

King Fahd meets Arafat, Spanish crown prince

RIYADH (R) — Saudi Arabia's King Fahd on Saturday held separate talks with visiting Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Spain's Crown Prince Felipe. Saudi state television showed footage of the seated king receiving the two dignitaries at his palace in Riyadh. The official SPA news agency said Arafat, who is on a one-day visit to the kingdom, held talks with senior Saudi officials on the Middle East peace process and other regional and international issues. Felipe started a three-day visit to Saudi Arabia on Saturday. SPA said.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية مستقلة تصدر عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية، الرأى

EU insists on monitors at Ocalan trial

ELTVILLE (AFP) — The European Union on Saturday renewed an appeal for Turkey to allow international observers to monitor the trial of Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan respecting the rule of law. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, hosting a meeting of EU foreign ministers, said Ocalan's trial must be "fair and respect the rule of law." Turkey on Feb. 23 rejected an earlier call by the European Union to allow foreign observers to attend the trial. Fischer said the European Union "unambiguously condemns PKK terrorism." Fischer insisted the Kurdish problem was a Turkish problem.

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'Famine has killed over three million North Koreans'

PARIS (AFP) — Hwang Jang-Yop, the highest official to defect from North Korea, says famine has killed more than three million people in the Stalinist state, in an interview published Saturday. Hwang, the North's former chief ideologue and architect of its *juche* (self-reliance) philosophy, spoke to the French daily *Le Monde* in South Korea, where he now lives after defecting through Beijing in February 1997. Responding to a question about deaths from famine in North Korea, Hwang gave a summary of the years 1995-1998 saying, "at the end of last year, the famine has caused more than three million deaths."

Leftist rebels clash with paramilitaries in Colombia

BOGOTA (AFP) — Heavy fighting between leftist guerrillas and rightist paramilitaries may have left up to 30 people dead in northern Colombia, according to reports from local officials Thursday. Municipal officials in Carmen de Bolívar told capital radio stations that the fighting broke out after the paramilitaries killed 13 peasants and abducted eight others. Roberto Aranzola of Carmen de Bolívar's local council told Radionet that 400 rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) had surrounded the column of 50 paramilitaries who had killed the campesinos hours earlier.

Palestinian boy shot in head

RAMALLAH (AFP) — A seven-year-old Palestinian boy underwent surgery for a head wound on Saturday after being hit by a rubber-coated steel bullet fired by Israeli troops during clashes in a village north of Jerusalem, residents said. After the operation for a fracture to the skull, doctors at Ramallah hospital described the condition of Assaf Hussein Audi Barghuti as stable. Barghuti was wounded during sporadic clashes on Friday night in the village of Deir Abu Mishaal from where he was taken to hospital, villagers said.

Gunman wounds six on Rio bus

RIO DE JANEIRO (R) — A gunman opened fire on passengers riding an early morning bus in a poor section of Rio de Janeiro on Saturday, wounding six before fleeing, a police spokeswoman said. The man began shooting after boarding the bus, police said. Six of the 15 passengers were struck by bullets, with one man hit four times. Authorities said the bus continued a short distance, stopped and the gunman ran off.

Indian journalist killed in New Delhi

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Police Saturday found the mutilated body of a senior journalist in the Indian capital, the second such killing here in less than two months. The body of Irfan Hussain, a cartoonist for the popular "Outlook" magazine, was found five days after he was reported missing while driving home in New Delhi's crime-prone eastern districts. Police said Hussain's murder appeared to be linked to robbery as neither his brand new car nor his belongings were found following the recovery of his badly-mutilated body from an interstate highway. A total of four New Delhi journalists have been killed in the past year — two from private television channels known for their investigative reporting.

In meeting with U.S. envoy Indyk King underlines importance of commitment to Mideast peace

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Saturday held talks with a senior U.S. official on the stalled Middle East peace process during which he underlined the importance of implementing signed peace accords.

"Failure to commit to the accords will deepen the lack of confidence and frustration in the region," said King Abdullah at a meeting with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Martin Indyk.

"Commitment to the implementation of the peace accords is of paramount importance," King Abdullah said at the meeting, which was attended by Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabariti, Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib and U.S. Ambassador William Burns.

King Abdullah said the late King Hussein played a key role in the conclusion of the Wye agreement and stressed that "commitment to peace has become a pressing need and not an election choice."

On the domestic front, the King noted that Jordan is currently working towards reforming the national economy, a process which he said is bound to result in social burdens on the Jordanian people. But he added that Jordan hopes friendly nations' assistance will help the Kingdom overcome any obstacles.

Referring to Iraq, King Abdullah said "Jordan's position is unchanged and is identical to the stands of the Arab countries," which demand the lifting of the U.N.-imposed sanctions on the Iraqi people and the safeguarding of Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

"Jordan will never take any part in instigating any changes in Iraq. This is the concern of the Iraqi people alone," the King said.

King Abdullah added that the embargo has become an intolerable burden on the Iraqi people.

Earlier, Indyk met with Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh for talks on Jordan-U.S. relations. The U.S. official reaffirmed Washington's support for the Kingdom's efforts to achieve peace and reform its national economy.

Speaking to Jordan Television after the meeting, Indyk said: "We are keen to do what we can to support Jordan in this time of transition and to support His Majesty King Abdullah and the Rawabdeh cabinet. The prime minister made clear the priorities in terms of promoting growth in the Jordanian economy, and we talked about ways in which the U.S. can help not only in providing substantial assistance to Jordan, but also by mobilising international support like rescheduling debts



His Majesty King Abdullah meets Saturday with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Martin Indyk in Amman for talks on the Middle East peace process (AFP photo)

that would give the Jordanian economy resources needed to grow."

"We also need to open markets in the Gulf and in the West Bank and Israel so that there is a chance for Jordanian exports to grow, which would create more jobs in Jordan."

Referring to the peace process, Indyk said both sides have a commitment to comply with the peace accords.

"We feel that both sides should meet their obligations under the Wye agreement. We

are working under the Wye accord very hard to get Palestinians to fully comply, and the Israelis should do so also. But there is a reality in Israel that there is a pre-occupation at the moment but it is very important that both sides fulfil their obligations and that is a position that we make very clear to all parties."

On the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, Indyk said: "There has been a stagnation on these tracks for two and half years now. We would like to see that

those talks proceed at the same time as the Palestinian track. But realistically, that is something that is not going to happen until after the Israeli elections. What we are interested in doing now is seeing if it is possible to prepare the ground for moving on the Syrian and the Lebanese tracks after the Israeli elections as well."

Indyk's meeting with Rawabdeh was attended by Planning Minister Rima Khalaf, Foreign Minister Khatib and U.S. Ambassador Burns.

PLO bodies meet in April to decide statehood plans

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (R) — PLO ruling bodies will meet in early April to decide whether Palestinians will declare an independent state on May 4, an advisor to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat said on Saturday.

"Several PLO bodies will be called in April, most probably in the first week of April, to announce the Palestinian decision regarding declaration of a state," said Nabil Abu Rdainah.

He said the meetings would be held in self-rule areas. Arafat's most senior aide and other PLO officials said the PLO's ruling executive committee would call for a meeting of the Palestinian Central Council to announce plans regarding statehood.

The 125-member Central Council serves as the intermediate body between the Palestine Liberation Organisation's (PLO's) Executive Committee and the Palestine National Council, the PLO's supreme decision-making body.

PLO officials said the decision on whether to declare statehood on May 4 or not would come after Arafat concludes consultations with Arab states, Europe and the

United States. Arafat will consult with U.S. President Bill Clinton on the issue of a Palestinian state during his visit to Washington on March 23. Washington has advised Arafat to delay the declaration, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Edward Walker said last week.

Arafat has said the Palestinians are entitled to declare a state on May 4, the date set in interim Palestinian-Israeli peace deals for the completion of a final peace treaty.

But Palestinian officials have said Arafat would weigh delaying declaration of a state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip if Europe and the U.S. promised to recognise Palestinian statehood at a later date. Israelis will vote in a general election on May 17. "Arafat is now studying the declaration issue and is carrying out consultations with all parties which signed the 1993 Oslo deal to see what is best done regarding the statehood announcement," a Palestinian official, who declined to be identified, said.

"If Arafat doesn't get the price he wants for postponing declaration, he will go ahead and declare a state on May 4," the official said.

Rawabdeh urges media to suggest changes to press law

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh yesterday invited members of the press to submit to Parliament and the government their suggestions to amend the controversial Press and Publications Law.

"We will launch a dialogue on the media with open hearts and open minds," Rawabdeh told members of the Jordan Press Association (JPA) council during a half hour meeting at the Professional Associations Complex. "The Parliament is the final reference point for all legislation, but we will continue discussions with the press association and all civil institutions."

Journalists in mid-1997 began a campaign to stave off

the introduction of highly restrictive legislation on the press, an effort that finally failed last fall, when Parliament, under pressure from the government, endorsed the most restrictive law in the Kingdom's history. Journalists sought to amend the law during the administration of the previous government — which resigned only 10 days ago — but failed to generate support for the initiative in either the Lower House or the Cabinet.

Although yesterday's meeting did not result in a solid announcement of government support to repeal or amend the law as many had hoped, JPA President Seif Sherif described the meeting as short but fruitful.

Sherif said he solicited the

introduction of highly restrictive legislation on the press, an effort that finally failed last fall, when Parliament, under pressure from the government, endorsed the most restrictive law in the Kingdom's history. Journalists sought to amend the law during the administration of the previous government — which resigned only 10 days ago — but failed to generate support for the initiative in either the Lower House or the Cabinet.

premier's "courageous vision" in support of the JPA's demand to amend 13 articles in the law that most severely curtail press freedoms and free speech.

"There were no promises," he said. "But the prime minister was flexible and understanding. He said that all doors are open and that [the executive and legislative authorities and the press] can cooperate."

His Majesty King Abdullah's letter of designation did not place the media high on the Rawabdeh government's agenda, but journalists anticipate that the appointment of three "liberal" politicians in key posts — Prime Minister Rawabdeh, Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabariti and Information Minister Nasser Lawzi — will advance their cause.

Rawabdeh spoke adamantly against several articles in the 1998 press law during the debate in Parliament last summer, while Kabariti, during his term as prime minister three years ago, commenced the "deconstruction" of the Information Ministry with a view to leaving in its wake an information bureau and a government spokesperson. Kabariti also opposed the law in the Senate.

Lawzi is also known to favour greater press freedoms and enjoys a good relationship with much of the media.

Journalists noted that the meeting with the JPA has come ahead of meetings with all other professional associations or political parties and believe that momentum to review the law is gaining ground.

Last week, 12 Lower House

deputies submitted a petition to amend several articles in the law to House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali. Their request will be presented to the 80-member plenary, which in turn must muster a simple majority before requesting the government to agree to the amendments.

Yesterday, Press and Publications Department Director Iyad Qattan said the government had "no objection" to Parliament amending the law.

"If [deputies] decide to amend, it's their constitutional prerogative," said Qattan. "The government is looking for all reasonable and workable alternatives and its main concern is that all changes are well-studied so that the next law does not have loopholes or gaps and is agreed on by all."

Arafat orders review of death sentence against security agent

GAZA CITY (AFP) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has ordered a review of a death sentence against a former security agent that sparked some of the most violent protests ever against his self-rule government, an official said Saturday.

"President Arafat met the killer's family and granted their wish to review the death sentence handed down to Ra'd Al Attar and the sentences given by the court to his two accomplices," Mahmoud Hussein, secretary of Arafat's Faith

movement in the Gaza Strip, told AFP.

The sentence against Attar, a former Palestinian security agent and activist in the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), sparked two days of rioting on Wednesday and Thursday in his home town of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

Two teenagers were killed and dozens of people, mainly police, were injured in some of the most violent and widespread protests against the Palestinian

National Authority (PNA) since its creation in 1994.

Attar, from a prominent Rafah family, was convicted by a Palestinian security court for the February killing of Rifat Judeh, another policeman from the same town.

The court also sentenced two of Attar's associates to lengthy prison terms.

Arafat said in London on Thursday the three men were a "terrorist unit" which had been "preparing a terrorist operation."

The Palestinian leader's decision to review the sentence against Attar brought calm to the streets of Rafah on Saturday as shops and schools reopened and residents went about their business as normal, witnesses said.

The atmosphere in the town on Friday had been one of wary calm, broken only by a peaceful demonstration of some 300 mourners for the two slain youths which marched from nearby Yabna refugee camp to the town centre, according to

journalists escorted to Rafah by Palestinian police.

In a further attempt to clear the air, Arafat promised the families of the two 17-year-olds killed when Palestinian police opened fire on stone-throwing protesters on Wednesday that the circumstances surrounding the killings would be investigated and described the youths as "martyrs."

The Palestinian leader also ordered the release of those detained during the two days of rioting.

Lebanese president accuses Israel of stepping up tension with flights over Beirut

BEIRUT (AFP) — Lebanese President Emile Lahoud Saturday accused Israel of "creating tension" with its military night flights over Lebanon, describing them as a violation of Lebanese sovereignty.

The action illustrates "Israel's aggressive policy aimed at creating tension, in particular after Lebanon refused to modify the 1996 [ceasefire] arrangements," he said in a statement carried by the official ANI news agency.

Israeli Defence Minister Moshe

Arens said earlier this month that Israel might stop observing the truce conditions, which prevent the targeting of civilians.

Lahoud's remarks echoed those of Prime Minister Salim Hoss, who criticised Saturday intensive Israeli flights over Beirut and other parts of Lebanon, saying they were intended to terrorise civilians.

"The intensive overflying Friday night by Israeli warplanes of several Lebanese areas is a continuation of the violation of our sovereignty and is intended to terrorise civilians, especially women and the elderly," Hoss said.

"If Israel thinks it can intimidate us and make us relinquish our right to demand an unconditional Israeli retreat, it is dreaming, because our position is unshakable," he said.

In Jerusalem, an Israeli military spokesman confirmed the flights. "Our air force carried out a certain number of missions in Lebanon overnight," he said without providing further details. The

Lebanese military was put on a state of alert Friday night when Israeli helicopters flew over the Bekaa Valley, a Hizbollah guerrilla stronghold, Beirut and its northern suburbs.

Tanks were deployed along the seaboard in Beirut, guns pointing out to sea and troops manning road blocks along the mountain route from the capital to the Bekaa region held their arms at the ready.

The Shiite Muslim anti-Israeli resistance movement Hizbollah also placed its forces on maximum

alert footing, ordering increased security measures to thwart a possible Israeli commando operation directed at Hizbollah leaders.

Lebanese security officials said Israeli helicopters Friday flew two sorties over the eastern flank of Mount Lebanon, which overlooks the Bekaa Valley where the Syrian military has been stationed since 1976.

It was in this region five years ago that an Israeli helicopter-borne commando captured Islamic fundamentalist leader Sheikh

Mustafa Dirani and took him to Israel where he is still detained.

Seven Israelis were killed at the end of February in Hizbollah attacks in southern Lebanon, including Brigadier General Erez Gerstein, the most senior Israeli officer in Lebanon. His successor, General Eli Amitai said Wednesday during a tour of inspection in the Israeli-occupied "security zone" that Israel had "decided to retaliate in a decisive way" for the Feb. 28 attack.

Kurdish leader looks to Baghdad for settlement

DUBAI (AFP) — An Iraqi Kurdish leader said he was seeking a settlement with Baghdad and doubted the opposition was capable of toppling President Saddam Hussein, in an interview published on Saturday.

"Our dialogue with Baghdad is still going on and has never been broken," Massoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), told the London-based Arabic newspaper Al Hayat.

"We need to turn to Baghdad for a settlement to the Kurdish issue, because

mutual understanding between the two sides is the only way to reach a just and stable peace," he said.

Barzani said the opposition would "probably remain incapable of playing a major role in negotiations and changes because of its divisions and disagreements over a clear programme."

"We believe the opposition will unite when it is free of regional and international influences," he said, in reference to U.S. support for the Iraqi opposition in exile.

Barzani said the KDP had explained to the United States that it was "responsible for the fate of our people and can therefore not act like an opposition in exile."

On Thursday, Iraq's ruling Baath Party called for Kurdish factions in the north of the country to rid themselves of U.S. influence and reach a "peaceful solution" to the issue of power-sharing with Baghdad.

The KDP and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) have controlled northern

Iraq in defiance of Baghdad since the 1991 Gulf War. Iraqi Kurdistan has had a degree of autonomy since 1974.

U.S. and British warplanes patrol the skies of northern Iraq to provide a security umbrella for the Kurds against Saddam's forces.

The allies have carried out almost daily attacks in the northern "no-fly" zone and a similar exclusion zone in southern Iraq since December, as Iraq challenges the overflights with its air defences.



Syrian students clad in military uniforms holding hearts bearing a picture of their President Hafez Assad march in Damascus on Saturday. Thousands of students marched in celebration of the beginning of Assad's fifth term in office (AFP photo)

Iraq turns down French initiative

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq has turned down a French initiative aimed at defusing the crisis in ties with the United Nations since the Desert Fox air war, an official daily said Saturday.

But the French interests section in Baghdad said it has not received any official word from Baghdad.

Babel, which is run by President Saddam Hussein's eldest son, Uday, said that "certain points" of the initiative would "impose a steel vice on Iraq, allowing its enemies to prolong the embargo but in a new way."

The U.N. Security Council is expected to "modify the French project, with a few minor concessions, so as to persuade Iraq to accept," according to Babel.

The Security Council was "spurred on by the

fact that the project was submitted by a country which has quite good relations with Iraq," the newspaper said.

But, it said, Iraq's "wise leadership has realised the situation... and that's why our position is to refuse this plan."

Iraq's position is to demand "a total lifting of the embargo because it no longer has any justification," Babel said, renewing its stand that Baghdad has already been disarmed in keeping with U.N. resolutions.

An oil embargo in force since the August 1990 invasion of Kuwait cannot be lifted until the Security Council certifies the elimination of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

The United States and Britain launched a four-day Desert Fox air war on Iraq in December for its

reported failure to cooperate fully with U.N. weapons inspectors.

France has since launched an initiative to lift the oil embargo, with Iraq's revenues kept under strict supervision, while setting up a new system of long-term monitoring of Iraqi arms programmes.

A source at the French interests section said its outgoing head, Yves Aubin de la Messuziere, discussed the initiative with Iraqi officials in his final meetings before the end of his mission.

But he did not receive an official response.

De la Messuziere met Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan, Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz and Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Sahhaf in his farewell talks last week.

Research award named for El-Baz

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Geological Society of America (GSA) has established the "Farouk El-Baz Award for Desert Research," to be given annually to a scientist selected from a group of geologist nominees, a recent Boston University statement said.

The award will be managed by the Quaternary Geology Division of the GSA, a professional society established over a century ago that now represents 16,000 geologists worldwide.

"The award is intended to encourage young scientists to strive for excellence in desert research," said El-Baz, research professor and director of the Centre for Remote Sensing at Boston University (<http://www.remotesensing.bu.edu>).

"Deserts have not received as much attention by geologists as other types of landforms," he added "that is why we need to encourage and reward arid land studies." The award was established by the GSA Foundation, a non-profit, tax-exempt organisation that endows the educational programmes of the GSA.

The foundation will accept and acknowledge contributions to the Farouk El-Baz Award to increase the existing endowment fund of \$18,000.

Any scientist may be nominated for this award, and applicants need not be geologists or U.S. citizens. Documentation of published research results that significantly advance our knowledge of deserts must accompany the nominations, which are to be sent to Farouk El-Baz Award, Professional Development Department, Geological Society of America, 3300 Penrose Place, Boulder CO 80301, USA.

Islamists to meet, mull parliament session

ANKARA (R) — Turkey's mainstream secularist leaders waited in the wings of parliament on Saturday, hoping to thwart an attempt by rebel deputies to reconvene parliament and try to delay elections set for April 18.

The rebel MPs, most of whom are disenchanted because of their exclusion from candidate lists by powerful party leaders, have virtually no hope of delaying the polls.

But the bid to reconvene parliament itself stirred secularist fears the main Islamist opposition party, Virtue, could "seize control" of the session and use it for its own ends.

Virtue was due to meet at 1100 GMT to decide whether to attend. If it decided in favour, parliament could obtain

the necessary quorum of 184 members.

If it stays away, as secularist leaders want, the session (1300 GMT) could be over in an hour and the election campaign would resume with full force.

Virtue has been divided over whether to support the move to reconvene. Its leader, Recai Kutan, says he will not attend.

Commentators say some Virtue members had hoped secularist parties would call an outright boycott.

This would have given Virtue the chance to support the rebels, create a quorum and promote bills scrapping laws used to prosecute Virtue politicians and ban former Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan. That calculation now seems to have failed.

Three leading contenders in the April polls. Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit and conservative rivals Tansu Ciller and Mesut Yilmaz, will in body or spirit be hovering near the chamber in case the cross-party rebel MPs, dubbed the "disgruntled," manage to summon a quorum.

If a quorum is reached, all three will be under pressure to seize the initiative, enter the hall and use the session to debate national security issues and pass urgent laws relating to jailed Kurdish rebel chief Abdullah Ocalan.

Ecevit says these laws are best left to the next parliament.

On the cards could be a law granting amnesty to Ocalan's guerrillas still hiding out in the mountainous southeast, largely

populated by Kurds.

Also possible is a constitutional amendment, long sought by the European Union, to remove the military judge from state security courts — the type of court that will try Ocalan for treason.

Newspaper commentators said the MPs were backed behind the scenes by Erbakan, who could try to use a Virtue-dominated parliamentary regrouping to push through legislation that would allow him to run in April.

"According to their calculations, parliament will meet with support from Erbakan to both pass the draft laws and overthrow the government by a censure motion," columnist Taha Akkol wrote in the liberal daily Milliyet.

'Arabs poor and ignorant'

CAIRO (AFP) — Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi, who has turned his back on Arab countries for observing U.N. sanctions on Tripoli, has denounced Arabs as poor, ignorant and underdeveloped.

"Europe is made up of states without common characteristics. Despite this, they have now formed a common market and common currency," Qadhafi told Saturday's edition of October, an Egyptian government magazine.

"The Arabs have in common ignorance, poverty and underdevelopment," Qadhafi was quoted as telling Egyptian newspaper editors on Tuesday while he was on a week-long visit to Egypt.

"In my opinion, the Arabs are not ready to defend against the American-Zionist plot," Qadhafi said, explaining why he announced in September that Libya was

now an African country rather than an Arab one. Furious that Arab states refused to follow African nations in unilaterally breaking the seven-year U.N. sanctions on Libya, Qadhafi scrapped the Libyan ministry of Arab unity and cut back representation to the Arab League.

To illustrate the switch in Libyan loyalties, official television has replaced the map of the Arab World seen by viewers with that showing only the African continent.

"We are living through a period of decadence where our speeches transform defeat into victories and where we call for submission," the Libyan leader told Egyptian journalists. "The Arabs don't want to be told the truth. If I told the truth to every Arab country I would be forced to break with all the states," Qadhafi said.

"Warn the Arabs that either they unite or they will be carried away by the flood," he said in an appeal to the writers.

Meanwhile, officials said Qadhafi made his way back to Libya on Saturday from the Mediterranean city of Alexandria following an eight-day visit to Egypt, where he discussed efforts to end the Lockerbie crisis.

The United States and Britain have given Qadhafi until the end of March to finalise a deal for the handover of two Libyans suspects for trial in the 1988 bombing of a U.S. airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, which killed 270 people. It was not clear how they would enforce the deadline. The two have threatened to push for more U.N. sanctions other than those imposed on Libya starting in 1992.

"Deserts have not received as much attention by geologists as other types of landforms," he added "that is why we need to encourage and reward arid land studies." The award was established by the GSA Foundation, a non-profit, tax-exempt organisation that endows the educational programmes of the GSA.

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Lebanon marks 21 years of Israeli occupation

BEIRUT (AFP) — Twenty-one years since Israeli troops first marched into Lebanon, the country — which nearly tore itself apart in a civil war — remains the last bloody battlefield in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Lebanon marks the anniversary Sunday of the 1978 Israeli invasion, the first in a series of violent military incursions that left eight per cent of Lebanese territory occupied.

The tiny eastern Mediterranean Arab country lacks the means to do much more than mark these anniversaries and continue to call for an unconditional Israeli pullout from southern Lebanon.

But mounting Israeli casualties inflicted by Lebanese resistance movements, mainly the Shiite Muslim Hizbollah, have given the Israelis food for thought about the benefits

of maintaining their occupation of south Lebanon.

Lebanon has also taken centre stage in the campaigning for Israel's May general elections after seven Israelis were killed in south Lebanon within a week, including the top Israeli general there.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's main rival, Labour Party leader Ehud Barak, has vowed that within a year, he would pull Israeli forces out of the "Lebanese quagmire" where more than 1,200 Israeli troops have died since 1978. Israel is ready to negotiate a troop withdrawal from Lebanon if the Lebanese side agrees to discuss security arrangements, the prime minister's office said last week.

Beirut fears that any talk of a unilateral Israeli retreat may be only campaign rhetoric.

Israel launched Operation Litani, its first large-scale

offensive into Lebanon, on March 14, 1978, to protect its northern territories from cross-border attacks by Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) guerrillas.

Despite the adoption that year of U.N. Security Council Resolution 425, which calls for an immediate Israeli retreat, the Jewish state kept forces in Lebanon.

In 1982, Israel again invaded Lebanon in Operation Peace for Galilee, this time occupying Beirut at the height of the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war — the first time Israeli forces had seized an Arab capital.

Israeli forces crushed the Syrian air force in several hours, and ejected Syrian troops and PLO guerrillas from the Lebanese capital.

Unable to conclude a peace treaty with Lebanon in 1983, Israel became increasingly

concerned about troop losses and withdrew to its current buffer zone along the Israeli border in 1985.

Lebanese guerrillas, mostly from the Iranian- and Syrian-backed Hizbollah, began repeatedly firing on northern Israel in response to Israeli strikes that harmed civilians in southern Lebanon.

After the launch of the Middle East peace process in Madrid in 1991 and Israel's accords with the Palestinians in 1993 and 1995 and Jordanians in 1994, southern Lebanon remained a battleground for a proxy war between Syria and Israel, and Iran and Israel.

In 1993, Israel staged its week-long "Operation Accountability" onslaught in Lebanon after a series of rocket attacks by the well-equipped Hizbollah.

JORDAN TELEVISION

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PROGRAMME TWO

19:10 News headlines
19:25 Doc - Perspective
20:00 News in Arabic (Channel 2 links up with channel 1)
20:30 Programme on the late His Majesty King Hussein
21:00 Islamic History in Jordan
21:30 On the Banks of Jordan
22:00 News in English
22:10 Doc. - National Geographic
23:00 News in Arabic (Channel 2 links up with channel 1)

PRAYER TIMES

04:27 Fajr
05:44 (Sunrise) Duha
11:45 Dhuhur
15:08 'Asr
17:47 Maghreb
19:03 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweifeh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771751
Armenian International Church Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifeh Tel. 5920146
The United Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331
The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Temperatures are expected to drop slightly with moderate conditions prevailing. Clouds will appear at low altitudes and winds northwesterly moderate. In Aqaba, it will be warm, winds northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Min./Max. temp.
Amman 08/18
Aqaba 12/24
Deserts 05/21
Jordan Valley 11/24

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun 07/13
Jerash 08/21
Um Qays 07/25
Madaba 08/18
Petra 07/21
Dead Sea 12/25

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Yousef Rashid 4875792
Dr. Jum'a Abu Dhahab 4758848
Dr. Khalil Jilani 4784450
Dr. Walid Masri 5675485

AMMAN:
Firas Pharmacy 5661912
Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730
Mayahab Pharmacy 5537804
Rula Al Dana Pharmacy 5136169

IRBID:

Dr. Issam Salih (02)246858
Fou'ad Pharmacy (02)273360

ZARQA:

Dr. Walid Hakeem (05)982799
Palestine Pharmacy (05)983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 4637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192, 4621111, 4637777
Fire Brigade 4617101
Blood Bank 4775121
Highway Police 5343402
Traffic Police 4896390
Public Security Dept. 4630321
Hotel Complaints 5605800
Price Complaints 5661176
Water & Sewage Complaints 489467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 0132
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101
Jordan Television 4773111
Radio Jordan 4774111
Water Authority 5680100
J. Electricity Authority 5815615
Electric Power Co. 4636381
RJ Flight Information 44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199
The Islamic, Abdali 5666131/7
Hussein Medical Centre 5856856
Luzmila 4630195
Khalidi Maternity 4642816
Akileh Maternity 4642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362
Malhas, J. Amman 4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071
Shmeisani Hospital 5607431
Jordan Hospital 5607550
University Hospital 5333444
Al-Muasher Hospital 5667279
Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 477101/3
Al-Bashir 4775111/26
Army, Marka 4891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 5157100
Amal Hospital 5607155
Al Ajl Al Cancer Centre 5353000
Jerusalem Hospital 4317181

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986731
Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990

IRBID:

Princess Basma Hospital (02)275555
Roman Catholic Hospital (02)272275

Ibn Al Nafees Hospital

(02) 7101372, (02) 7105101
Rosary Sisters Hospital (02) 7102831, (02) 7102011
Speciality Hospital (02) 7103100

AQABA:

Princess Haya Hospital (03)2014111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200 where it should always be verified. Information on other flights is obtained on telephone (44) 52700 or (44) 523250. Information on Royal Wings flights can be supplied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
08:30 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
08:38 Jeddah (RJ)
08:50 Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
09:00 Beirut (RJ)
10:20 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
10:40 Bombay (RJ)
16:45 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
17:45 London (RJ)

Other Flights

14:35 Istanbul (TK)
18:00 Dubai, Damascus (EK)
18:40 Beirut (ME)
18:45 Kiev (6U)
19:05 Paris (AF)
20:25 Tel Aviv (LY)
20:40 Cairo (MS)
23:30 London, Beirut (BA)
23:35 Amsterdam (KL)
23:55 Larnaca (CY)
00:55 Bucharest (RO)
02:00 Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

07:50 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
10:30 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
16:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
18:45 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
05:20 Beirut (RJ)

Other Flights

07:10 Frankfurt (LH)
15:35 Istanbul (TK)
19:00 Dubai (EK)
19:40 Kiev (6U)
20:00 Beirut (ME)
21:10 Tel Aviv (LY)
21:40 Cairo (MS)
00:35 Amsterdam (KL)
01:55 Bucharest (RO)
03:00 Rome (AZ)
07:15 Beirut, London (BA)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

08:15 Tel Aviv (arriving from QAIA) (RW)
08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)
20:30 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

Married couple plead not guilty to 12 premeditated murder charges

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — A married couple who were arrested in February on charges of robbery and murder pleaded not guilty to charges of premeditated murder last week, their attorney said Saturday.

Bilal Musa Qassem and his wife, Susan Ibrahim, are standing trial at the Criminal Court on 12 charges of murder. The two allegedly committed the murders in 11 separate incidents, during which they also robbed their victims. The crimes allegedly were committed in Zarqa, Azraq and Amman between the years of 1994 and 1998. The defendants fled to Libya in May 1998.

Qassem was formally charged by Criminal Prosecutor Ghaleb Rababah with first degree murder, while his wife, Susan, faces charges of complicity in murder.

Their court-appointed

defence attorney, Ali Talafih, told the Jordan Times that the two, will be tried on each murder separately, and that they are currently on trial for the murder of Mireweh Salameh, a resident of the Awajan area in Zarqa.

According to the prosecution charge sheet, the two suspects plotted to kill the victim because they knew he kept large amounts of money in his house.

On May 26, 1998, the two planned to celebrate Susan's birthday at the victim's house. The charge sheet said after spending some time at Salameh's house, Qassem drew a knife he had hidden under his jacket and stabbed the victim several times in different parts of his body.

The two then searched the house, found JD31 in a small closet, and fled the scene after a woman residing in the area began screaming, "Call the police, call the police."

If convicted of premeditated murder, Qassem could face the death penalty under the Jordanian penal code.

The court tribunal has set March 22 as the date to begin hearing the testimonies of witnesses for the prosecution.

In late February 1999, the authorities announced the arrest of the couple, who reportedly have confessed to all 12 murders and 11 robberies and re-enacted their crimes.

They were extradited to the Kingdom in late 1998 after police had collected enough evidence to indict them. Authorities said the 12 murders all followed similar patterns.

They added that Susan played a key role in all the murders by allegedly facilitating her husband's entry into homes or other areas where the victims were killed.

Population and family health census reveals improvement in living standards

AMMAN (Petra) — A general census on population and family health conducted by the Department of Statistics in 1997 revealed that there has been a marked improvement in the Jordanian population's living standards between the 1970s and the 1990s.

A department statement Saturday said the survey showed a decline in the infant mortality rate, which dropped from 67 infant deaths per one thousand births in the 1970s to 29 per thousand by the end of 1997. The survey attributes improved mother-and-child primary health care services as a primary reason for the reduction in infant mortality. The survey showed a rapid

downward trend in reproduction rates; a trend expected to continue as more and more women of child bearing age use some form of birth control. It said married women's use of birth control rose from 35 points in 1990 to 53 points in 1997. The overall rate of reproduction rate in Jordan dropped to 4.4 children for every married woman in 1997 compared to 7.4 children in 1976.

The survey found that the past 10 years has witnessed a drop in the fertility rates, showing that the youth population — under the age of 15 — dropped from 52 per cent of the entire population in 1976 to 41 per cent in 1997.

Also according to the survey, a greater number of

women are educated. In 1990, the survey said, only one in every four women aged 15-49 received basic education. The percentage of women receiving basic education was 91 per cent in 1997. The number of women pursuing secondary and university education rose from 44 per cent to 53 per cent.

The statistics showed that the number of unmarried women of child bearing age rose from 34 per cent in 1976 to 45 per cent in 1997, and that education played a key role in delaying in women's marriages. In 1990, women married at an average age of 19.6 years, while by 1997, they married at an average age of 21.5 years.

Demining efforts require NGO support

By Hind-Lara Mango

AMMAN — Jordan's demining programme can be enhanced by the support of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in spreading mine awareness and providing rehabilitation to landmine victims, a senior military official has said. Brigadier General Nasser Majali Commander of the Royal Corps of Engineers.

During a Worldnet dialogue on the U.S. involvement in global demining, Brigadier General Nasser Majali said that military engineering units have been responsible for demining in Jordan since 1975.

He said, "Today, though, NGOs have the responsibility of spreading awareness and providing support to landmine victims, not regular armies."

He suggested NGOs participation in landmine issues would prove more useful and effective in Jordan.

Gen. Majali called for financial assistance to these NGOs since they have limited resources.

Last month, Jordan received \$1.9 million from the U.S. State Department for demining initiatives. The assistance was made available from the State Department \$50 million demining budget under the Non-Proliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining and Related (NADR) Funding.

Having ratified the Mine Ban Treaty on November 13th last year, Jordan has ten years to clear anti-personnel from public and private property. Landmine stocks must be destroyed within four years.

Giving NGOs financial backing to deal with rehabilitation and mine awareness "mirrors the desire of...countries to address demining as a confidence-building measure symbolising the end of conflict."

said Donald Steinberg, Special Representative of the U.S. President and Secretary of State for Global Humanitarian Demining.

"There is a need for a menu of capacities to be applied to any country. We need to involve NGOs, UNICEF and other organizations in mine awareness programmes," said Steinberg during the Worldnet dialogue hosted at the American Embassy last Thursday.

Jordanian NGOs have been requesting financial assistance to establishing landmine injury rehabilitation centres, but these calls have so far fallen on deaf ears. Funds have been allocated for demining purposes only.

Landmine survivors usually undergo numerous operations to salvage limbs, operations that are often accompanied by number trips abroad to fit prosthetics; a costly and emotionally draining experience, landmine survivors say.

In addition to the obvious humanitarian threat, landmines also bear socio-economic ramifications in resource-poor Jordan.

"About 10 per cent of the population live in areas still dangerous and economically unproductive because of landmines," Her Majesty Queen Noor said at the opening of the First Middle East Conference on Landmine Injury and Rehabilitation held in Amman last July.

After signing a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, Jordan launched a three-phase demining process to boost confidence between the two countries.

Approximately 65,000 mines have been cleared from the country over the last five years, but some 300,000 mines still lay buried in Jordanian soil.

"The aim is to safeguard civilians from the danger of these weapons, to return

land for cultivation, to enable the construction of new projects, and to support international efforts prohibiting the use of mines," Gen. Majali said.

The Mine Ban Treaty also known as the Ottawa Treaty, became part of international law at the beginning of this month.

It prohibits the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. To date 134 countries have signed the treaty and 64 have ratified it, among them, Jordan.

As a party to the treaty, the Kingdom is obliged to report on its landmines clearance activities and send an annual report to the United Nations on the number and types of anti-personnel mines stockpiled, destroyed and types kept for training purposes.

The U.S., although a promoter of demining and a donor to the global cause, has yet to sign the treaty, arguing that security concerns prevent it from doing so.

"The United States has not yet signed the Ottawa Treaty. This has to do with our role as a power with special responsibilities in the world, most specifically in Korea," explained Robert Beecroft, deputy assistant secretary of state in the Bureau of Political and Military Affairs.

In line with President Bill Clinton's pledge before the United Nations General Assembly five years ago to lead a global movement to eliminate anti-personnel landmines, he said the Beecroft told the Jordan Times that the U.S. will sign the Ottawa Treaty by 2006, "if we succeed in identifying and deploying suitable alternatives to our anti-personnel landmines and mixed antitank systems by then."

Islamists claim presidency in bar association elections

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — Nationalists Saturday lost their last stronghold in Jordan's professional associations after suffering a stunning defeat in the Jordan Bar Association elections, when lawyers elected an Islamist to the presidency.

However, they did capture six out of ten seats in the executive council elections.

Saleh Armouti secured the presidency of the 3,800-member bar association. He captured 1,430 votes in a second round of voting that stretched into the early hours of Saturday, beating his opponent Marwan Hussein who pulled 845 votes.

According to the association's regulation, presidential candidates must secure a majority of votes to win the seat. After the first round, Armouti had only 947 votes and Hussein only 392 votes.

The nationalists, dubbed the "green list" by barristers, include Mazen Rshaidat, who grabbed 1,226 votes, Shahr Kharzoun with 1,072 votes, Zahedi Daisi with 1,016 votes, Ali Dmour with 971 votes, Waddah Haddadin with 902 votes, and Samir Zeitune with 863 votes.

The Islamists, or the white list, neither gained nor lost on the council itself, retaining their three seats, now filled by incumbents Adnan Rashdan who won 966 votes, Amin Khawleh with 1,127 and Ziad Khaleifah with 1,127 votes, and newly-elected independent Mohammad Abu Jbara, with 1,141 votes.



Lawyers cast their votes in Friday's bar association elections. Balloting lasted until the early morning hours of Saturday (photo by Hatim Ali)

Twenty-five candidates vied for the executive council's 10 seats.

The JBA for many years has been a hotbed for political activists, mostly leftists. During the 1970s and 80s, when martial law was still in force, the associations were the most prominent outlets for political expression and acted as political fora in the absence of legalised political parties.

The executive council has traditionally been dominated by nationalists, who have always secured the president's post and the majority of the council's seats, leaving little

room for Islamists.

But nationalist dominance in all professional associations has given way to Islamist influence, particularly during the last decade.

Lawyers say nationalists lost the seat they dominated for decades because of a great desire for changes among young lawyers, said observers.

"Young lawyers want to rearrange the association from within," said Mahmoud Kharabshah, a lawyer, who is also a deputy in the Lower House of Parliament. "The change [in the association]

is natural. Greater variety brings more opportunity for creativity and promotion in the working conditions of lawyers across the country," Kharabshah told the Jordan Times.

"New people come every year, bringing with them new ideas and orientations and naturally this will effect the final outcome of the elections," said Sa'di Abidin, a prominent lawyer.

However, observers site the nationalists' "agreement to disagree" as another reason for their defeat. Six nationalist candidates ran for the presidential post and all believed they would win, observers said, while the Islamists had organised their ranks.

Had nationalists combined their efforts and agreed among themselves on which candidates should be fielded, they would have had a better chance of winning the seat, lawyers said.

Bar association elections are considered some of the most active amongst the country's 13 professional associations. Around 70 per cent of the members voted.

The new president replaces Hussein Mjalli, who served a two-year term as president and who did not run this year because he believed "the association needs new blood."

Earlier last month, Mjalli challenged the Court of First Instance order suspending Al Majd weekly newspaper for violations of the 1998 Press and Publications Law. The Court of Appeals overturned the First Instance Court decision two weeks ago.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Queen Noor receives Maldives president

AQABA (J.T.) — Her Majesty Queen Noor receives the President of the Republic of Maldives, Maumoon Abdul Quieoom in Aqaba. The president came to pay his respects and condolences to Queen Noor and other members of the Royal family. Also at the meeting were Their Royal Highnesses Princess Rania Abdullah, Princess Alia Al Hussein and Princess Iman.

Murphy to participate in eulogy

AMMAN (Petra) — U.S. assistant Secretary of State for Middle East and Near East Richard Murphy arrived in Amman here to take part in the eulogy ceremony of the late King Hussein which takes place here on Monday.

Pharmaceutical industries discuss marketing issues

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Health Ishaq Maraqa on Saturday received a delegation representing Jordanian pharmaceutical industries and discussed with them marketing issues. The two sides agreed on further coordination between the ministry and their companies to help support Jordanian pharmaceutical industries through increasing their exports to other countries.

RSCN participates in workshop

AMMAN (Petra) — The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) will take part in the international workshop on managing natural reserves which starts in Taipei today. The ten-day workshop is organised by the World Bird Council and the National Foundation for Bird Protection in Taiwan.

WHAT'S GOING ON

TRIBUTE

• Tribute over the passing of the late His Majesty King Hussein, sponsored by the Circassian community in Jordan, at Al Ahli Club, Eighth Circle on Monday March 15 at 6:00 p.m.

FILMS

• German film "Das Leben ist eine Baustelle" (with subtitles in English) at Goethe-Institut, Jabal Amman on Wednesday March 17 at 6:00 p.m.
• "The Mask of Zorro" at Books@Café, Jabal Amman at 8:30 p.m. (Tel. 4650457/8).

LECTURES

• "Palestine and the Future Challenges" (in Arabic) by Dr. Ali Al Jarbawi at Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, Jabal Amman on Monday March 15 at 6:00 p.m.
• "Poetry in the Classroom: Teacher's Requests" by Dr. Nicholas Linfield, at the British Council, Jabal Amman on Monday March 15 at 5:00 p.m.

Unionists push minimum wage agenda to curb hiring foreign labour

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — The government said Saturday that rampant unemployment could be better eased by attracting more investment rather than by the expulsion of foreign labourers, many of whom work illegally in menial jobs.

"Unemployment in Jordan cannot be solved only by expelling foreign workers, but also by increasing investment ventures inside the country," Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh told representatives of the one million-strong Federation of Jordan Trade Unions.

In return, unionists said they hoped Rawabdeh's 23-man Cabinet, formed ten days ago, would help ease the impact of unemployment — now officially estimated at 16 per cent and unofficially at up to 27 per cent.

But they insisted that efforts to replace foreign workers with Jordanians remained key to alleviating joblessness. They said a minimum wage in line with a clause in the Labour Law would discourage the hire of foreign labour.

"Jordanian workers can-

not replace foreigners unless Article 52 of the Labour Law, which calls for a minimum wage, is activated," said Mazen Ma'ayta, head of the trade union.

Successive governments have failed to implement the minimum wage which requires coordination between the government, the labour unions and Amman chambers of commerce and industry.

Rawabdeh's government has been instructed by His Majesty King Abdullah to combat unemployment, poverty and corruption and attract more investment.

The King also asked Rawabdeh to continue efforts launched by his predecessor, Fayez Tarawneh, to organise the foreign labour force in Jordan and to find more job opportunities for Jordanians in Gulf Arab states.

"The government has to act promptly and in accordance with a clear plan to replace guest workers with local labour and should speed up the process of exporting the Jordanian labour force to brotherly countries," he told Rawabdeh.

The former government

set April 1 as a deadline for the estimated one million foreign workers in Jordan to rectify their legal status by obtaining work permits in accordance with the labour law.

Any foreigners caught without proper papers after that date will face immediate deportation at the expense of the employer.

The Court of Cassation, in an unprecedented move last week, ruled that employers would face fines ranging between JD50 to JD100 if they employ non-Jordanians without proper working permits.

Brigadier Adnan Abdulah, borders and immigration chief at the Public Security Department, said his men have uncovered nearly 15,000 guest workers without legal working permits since the start of the year. He told the Jordan Times that 8,573 have been deported.

According to Ministry of Labour figures, 150,000 guest workers have so far rectified their status since a crackdown on foreign labour was launched last September.

Jordan explores free trade with EFTA member states

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan and the members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) are scheduled to open talks in Amman on Wednesday to pave the ground for the conclusion of a free trade agreement between the two sides.

An official source at the Ministry of Industry and Trade here said that through negotiations with EFTA members (Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein), Jordan hopes to acquire privileges and preferential treatment in trade similar to those it will enjoy under the Euro-Jordanian Partnership agreement and that grants Jordan customs and duty free access to EFTA markets.

Jordan and EFTA now are linked through a limited agreement which allowed Jordan to export

to the four countries goods worth JD360,000 in 1997. This figure dropped to JD20,000 in the first half of 1998. EFTA countries exported JD64 million to the Kingdom in 1997 and JD26 million in the first half of 1998.

According to the sources, Jordan held preliminary talks with EFTA representatives last September. The upcoming meetings are likely to end with the signing of a new agreement, the sources added.

Meanwhile, Minister of Finance Michel Marto was quoted Wednesday as saying that Jordan will soon start negotiations with the Paris Club to reschedule \$600 million of its foreign debt, payable from 1999-2001.

Marto was quoted by Al Ra'i Arabic daily as saying that the negotiations fol-

low Jordan's agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to extend the economic restructuring programme for three more years, allowing Jordan to receive an additional \$450 million in loans.

Marto said he expects Jordan's economic growth rate this year to be around three per cent, up by one per cent from last year.

The minister said Jordan is expected to increase the volume of its national exports this year, and to see an improvement in the rate of investment. He also said he hopes that demand for Jordanian workers in Arab Gulf states and additional U.S. and Japanese financial aid to Jordan's balance of payment will boost economic performance.

Bombs hit Kosovo, KLA men off to peace talks

PRISTINA, Serbia (R) — Bomb explosions rocked two towns in the Serbian province of Kosovo Saturday, killing at least two people and wounding many, sources close to an international truce monitoring commission said.

Two days before peace talks in Paris, fighting resumed north of the regional capital Pristina as Serb forces pressed on with a drive to split two areas held by ethnic Albanian guerrillas of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), reporters said.

Four KLA delegates left for the peace talks aboard a French military aircraft, witnesses said, but the KLA's political chief declined to reveal the movement's verdict on an autonomy plan for Kosovo.

The ethnic Albanian Information Centre (KIC) said a bomb went off in Kosovo Mitrovica, 45 km north-west of Pristina, just after 2 p.m. (1300 GMT).

"We had an explosion in the market place. One woman and one child were killed," said Heinz Nietsch, the local press officer for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) truce monitoring mission.

KIC said witnesses reported many people lying wounded in the market place.

About an hour earlier, two bombs exploded within 10 minutes of each other in Podujevo, 50 km north of Pristina, KIC said.

OSCE spokeswoman Beatrice Lacoste said one of the Podujevo bombs went off in a market.

"We've had preliminary reports of five casualties. It was a strong explosion and there could be more injured and even deaths but we're having problems confirming that," she said.

KIC said two ethnic Albanian men were killed and one man was seriously wounded in Podujevo.

KLA's political chief Hashim Thaqi, asked about his movement's response to an autonomy plan, said: "The definitive answer will be given in Paris."

Thaqi, who was preparing to leave the separatist army's secret hilltop headquarters for the peace talks, was asked if he knew what the answer would be. "Approximately, yes," he said.

In Paris NATO military commander General Wesley Clark, hinting that Belgrade would drop its refusal to sign the deal, said Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic understood the damage air power could inflict on his country.

The West has threatened air strikes if Milosevic fails to drop his opposition to a 28,000-strong NATO peace implementation mission in Kosovo, a key element of the peace deal. But doubts over the West's will to carry out the air attack threat linger.

Thaqi had been sequestered with separatist military leaders mulling a decision on the peace plan, which the KLA balked at signing after 17 days of discussions at the Rambouillet chateau outside Paris last month.

Ethnic Albanian political leaders have already agreed to the peace plan, which grants a three-year interim period of autonomy but not the guarantee of

independence the KLA has been fighting for, and have urged their military counterparts to sign up.

Western diplomats had hoped Thaqi and the KLA would back the accord well in advance of the Paris talks, enabling them to pressure Yugoslavia more effectively into agreeing to the deal.

U.S. officials have expressed open frustration at Thaqi's attitude. But Thaqi, who emerged as the effective head of the ethnic Albanian delegation at the Rambouillet talks, denied he had been postponing a decision.

"We said in Rambouillet we would be ready by March 15, and we've been consulting everyone and I don't think we've made any of our allies angry," he told reporters. He said Serb military attacks were endangering the peace process.

Heavy artillery exchanges could be heard near the villages of Ljupovaca, Mikusnic and Galica close to Vucitrin, some 20 km from Pristina in the third day of combat in the area.

Reporters saw refugees fleeing the area, adding to the 60,000 people humanitarian organisations say have been forced from their homes since a cease-fire agreed in October began to fall apart at the end of last year.

An estimated 2,000 people have been killed in Kosovo in the past year and tens of thousands displaced in the battles between Serb security forces and the KLA separatists in the province, which has a 90 per cent ethnic Albanian majority.



Sabah Chief Minister Bernard Dompok (right) and his wife Diana Dompok cast their vote in Kota Kinabalu. The east Malaysian state of Sabah entered its second and final day of polling Saturday in what was widely seen as Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's first popularity test since he sacked his former deputy Anwar Ibrahim last year (Reuters photo)

Voting ends in Malaysian state of Sabah

KOTA KINABALU, Malaysia (R) — Voting ended peacefully Saturday in the east Malaysian state of Sabah in elections considered a crucial test of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's popularity.

Early indicators showed the outcome of the polls could be uncomfortably close for the 73-year-old leader, who has held power since 1981, political allies said.

Mahathir's Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, an alliance of nine political parties, faced a strong challenge from the Christian-led Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) headed by Mahathir's arch-rival Joseph Pairin Kitingan.

"We're looking at winning about 22 to 23 seats at the moment, and I think the PBS will get about the same," said a BN official who asked not to be identified.

The BN needs only 25 of the 48 seats at stake to form a government. But Mahathir is hoping for a resounding two-thirds majority to reaffirm his

popularity in the country after economic and political upheavals last year.

The elections have no direct bearing on the four-fifths majority Mahathir's coalition holds in the federal parliament.

But they are the first since the Asian economic crisis hit Malaysia, and the first since Mahathir sacked his finance minister and deputy Anwar Ibrahim in September last year, igniting political unrest.

General elections are not due in Malaysia until April 2000.

Some 53 per cent of Sabah's 727,000 voters had turned out by 1.30 p.m. (0530 GMT), election commission officials said.

The first results, for the banggi constituency on Sabah's northern tip, were expected by 6 p.m. Counting of the votes for the remaining 47 areas had begun, with those results expected by midnight.

BN workers monitoring voter sentiment said the PBS,

which previously ruled Sabah for nine years, could badly dent the Muslim-led BN's chances. Christians and Buddhists form the majority of Sabah's 2.2 million people. BN workers said Parti Bersatu Sabah, another Muslim-based party led by a previous chief minister of Sabah, could spoil the show further for the ruling coalition by winning at least three of the 48 seats it is contesting.

"The pendulum is swinging by the minute. It's going to be a close fight for the bn," a BN activist said.

In the absence of a clear majority, the winning sides will have to consider forming a coalition government.

The BN fell short of a majority in the last state elections in 1994, winning only 23 seats compared to 25 for the PBS.

But the alliance took power after all but a few of the PBS' elected legislators defected within three weeks of the polls.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Nobel laureate Belo urges U.N. mission for E. Timor

LISBON (AFP) — The Timorese bishop and Nobel laureate Ximenes Belo Saturday said only the deployment of a United Nations mission would push forward the peace process in East Timor. "I do not trust the Indonesian armed forces," Belo told Lisbon's TSF radio. "Things cannot advance unless there is an international presence in the territory." Belo told the radio he feared Indonesian soldiers would put pressure on East Timor's residents to accept a draft autonomy package that Jakarta has proposed. If they reject it, Belo said in January it would allow the territory to choose independence. The bishop urged the territory's militias to disarm and the Indonesian soldiers to leave the former Portuguese colony annexed by Jakarta in 1976. He accused the Indonesian troops of creating a "climate of fear" in the territory by convincing the population that chaos would reign there the day the Indonesians leave. Portugal, which the U.N. still considers the territory's administrator, made a deal last week with Indonesia to allow the U.N. to organise a vote by direct ballot on the draft autonomy package.

Polish president arrives in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO (AFP) — Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski arrived Saturday in Sri Lanka for a two-day visit aimed at improving trade relations between the two countries, the foreign ministry said. Kwasniewski, the first eastern European head of state to visit Sri Lanka in 23 years, is accompanied by a 50-member trade delegation and will hold talks with his Sri Lankan counterpart, Chandrika Kumaratunga, the ministry said. The Sri Lankan government has also arranged meetings between visiting Polish businessmen and members of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, one of the country's premier trade bodies. Bilateral trade between the two countries was a modest \$32.4 million in 1998, with the balance of trade heavily in favour of Sri Lanka.

Hawking predicts DNA-modified humans in next Millennium

LONDON (AFP) — The advent of a new and improved kind of "genetically modified" human beings will be inevitable in the centuries to come, Stephen Hawking, the British astrophysicist, said Friday. "I am not advocating human genetic engineering as a good thing," Hawking said during a colloquium organised in Cambridge, where he teaches mathematics and physics at the University. "I am just saying it is likely to happen in the next millennium whether we like it or not," he added. The astrophysicist, best known for his work "A Brief History of Time," suffers from a motor neurone disease, is wheel-chair bound and has been unable to speak naturally since 1985. Speaking through a computerised voice synthesiser, he predicted people will look different after several centuries than they do now because of genetic manipulation and scientists' increasing grasp of the way DNA works. "I don't believe science fiction like 'Star Trek' where humans are more or less the same," he said. "Many people will say that genetic engineering on humans should be banned, but I rather doubt if they will be able to prevent it," Hawking said. "Genetic engineering on plants and animals will be allowed for economic reasons, and someone is bound to try it on humans," he added, concluding: "Unless we have a totalitarian world order someone will redesign and improve humans somewhere."

U.K. police open probe into dumped royal records

LONDON (R) — British police said Saturday they have opened an investigation into why confidential medical records about the royal family were found dumped by the side of a road. The papers also contained details of security arrangements of past royal visits and the blood types and medical details of Queen Elizabeth and other senior members of the royal family. The 70-page confidential folder was discovered along a road on the seaford at Ayr in Scotland, the Sun newspaper said Saturday. The documents also referred to 27 royal visits and details of approved medical specialists on standby in case of emergency. "We can confirm that we are in receipt of historical health board documents, the contents of which we are not in a position to disclose," a spokesman for Strathclyde police told Reuters. "Although the documentation is not recent there is obvious concern as to how it came to be in the public domain. Police enquiries in this regard are currently ongoing." A source familiar with the investigation said the documents might have been weeded out for destruction. A Buckingham Palace spokesman said Strathclyde police had informed the palace of the discovery. "As far as we are concerned, it is a police matter." The Sun quoted an unnamed man, who found the papers while walking his dog, as saying he could not believe what he was reading. "I know the blood types and other medical details of 10 members of the royal family. Many of the letters had confidential markings clearly across the top and bottom of the pages," the man said.

Malaysia's snake man ends 35-day stay with cobras

KUALA LUMPUR (R) — A former Malaysian zoo-keeper Saturday claimed a world record for staying with 250 poisonous snakes in a tiny cubicle for 35 days. Witnesses said Mohamad Noor Abdullah, better known as Mahaguru Seni, stepped out of the air-conditioned cubicle on Saturday after beginning his feat on Feb. 7. The 51-year-old man had been shut away with highly venomous king cobras and other reptiles at a shopping centre in Malaysia's northern state of Penang. Noor, who had said he wanted break the record of his son-in-law who lived with 150 cobras for 27 days in December, was accused of being cruel to the reptiles. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) blamed Noor for the death of 40 snakes. An SPCA official said: "Reptiles are not used to being in a cramped environment." One witness quoted Noor as saying Saturday that he would attempt to break his own record in two or three years' time.

Volcano near Mexico City spouts ash

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The Popocatepetl volcano near Mexico City has again spouted plumes of ash and water vapour, civil defence authorities reported. The activity Friday followed an explosion late Thursday that sent ash falling on the city of Puebla, 65 miles east of Mexico City, the national centre for disaster prevention reported. More light ash showers were likely to fall from Friday's explosions, the centre said. The 18,000-foot volcano is located just 80 kilometres southeast of Mexico City. The biggest of Friday's exhalations lasted about 11 minutes, authorities said.

NATO membership reaches 19; there may be more

INDEPENDENCE, Missouri (AP) — The first new entrants into NATO since the end of the Cold War have swelled the alliance's ranks to 19 — and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright says more may be on the way. "NATO enlargement is not an event but a process," Albright said Friday after the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland — all members of the now-defunct Soviet-led Warsaw Pact — joined the alliance at a ceremony at the Harry S. Truman Library.

Just when new entrants will be invited is not clear. That issue will be discussed at a NATO summit next month in Washington.

Hopefully waiting in the wings for the next round of enlargement are Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia.

"It is our common purpose, over time, to do for Europe's east what NATO has already helped to do for Europe's West," Albright said. "Steadily and systematically, we will continue erasing — without replacing — the line drawn in Europe by Stalin's bloody boot."

In a statement, President Bill Clinton welcomed the three new members, saying their presence in the organisation "will make America safer. It will make NATO stronger."

"For years they struggled with dignity and courage to regain their freedom. And now they will help us defend it for many years to come," Clinton said.

Joining Albright at Friday's induction ceremony were Foreign Ministers Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, Janos Martonyi of Hungary and Bronislaw Geremek of Poland.

Truman's library was chosen as the site for the event because it was during his presidency that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was founded on April 4, 1949, just under 50 years ago.

In assessing the new applicants for membership, the allies examine criteria such as democratic development and whether they meet minimum military requirements.

Also weighed is whether American and European security interests would be served.

Critics such as Michael Mandelbaum of the Johns Hopkins School of

Advanced International Studies contend that NATO expansion risks alienating Russia and could preclude closer ties with Moscow.

Indeed, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov called NATO's eastward push "a movement in the wrong direction."

Russian President Boris Yeltsin was among a number of non-NATO heads of state who were invited to the April summit in Washington, but his spokesman said Yeltsin probably will skip the proceedings.

Russian leaders from across the political spectrum are wary of the idea of a powerful military alliance coming increasingly close to Russia's borders.

The Clinton administration has said that even Russian membership in NATO should not automatically be ruled out.

But the three eastern European foreign ministers, asked about that possibility while en route here aboard Albright's plane, remained silent.

After a long pause, Hungary's Martonyi said: "Silence is your answer."

Beijing bomb scare as parliament session nears end

BEIJING (R) — Heavily armed Chinese police sealed off an area near a Beijing shopping centre Saturday, fearing an abandoned suitcase could contain a bomb, witnesses said.

Security has been tight in Beijing for the 11-day annual session of the National People's Congress, or parliament,

which ends Monday. China has been rocked by at least seven bombings this year which killed 33 and injured more than 100.

The attacks come against a backdrop of social discontent and economic slowdown in a year studied with sensitive political anniversaries, including the 10th of the Tiananmen massacre and the 50th of

Communist rule.

Millions of urban labourers have been laid off as China reforms antiquated state-run industries and unemployment is high in the countryside.

Violent crime has risen along with joblessness. Chinese President Jiang Zemin has vowed to "nip in the bud" any threats to stability.

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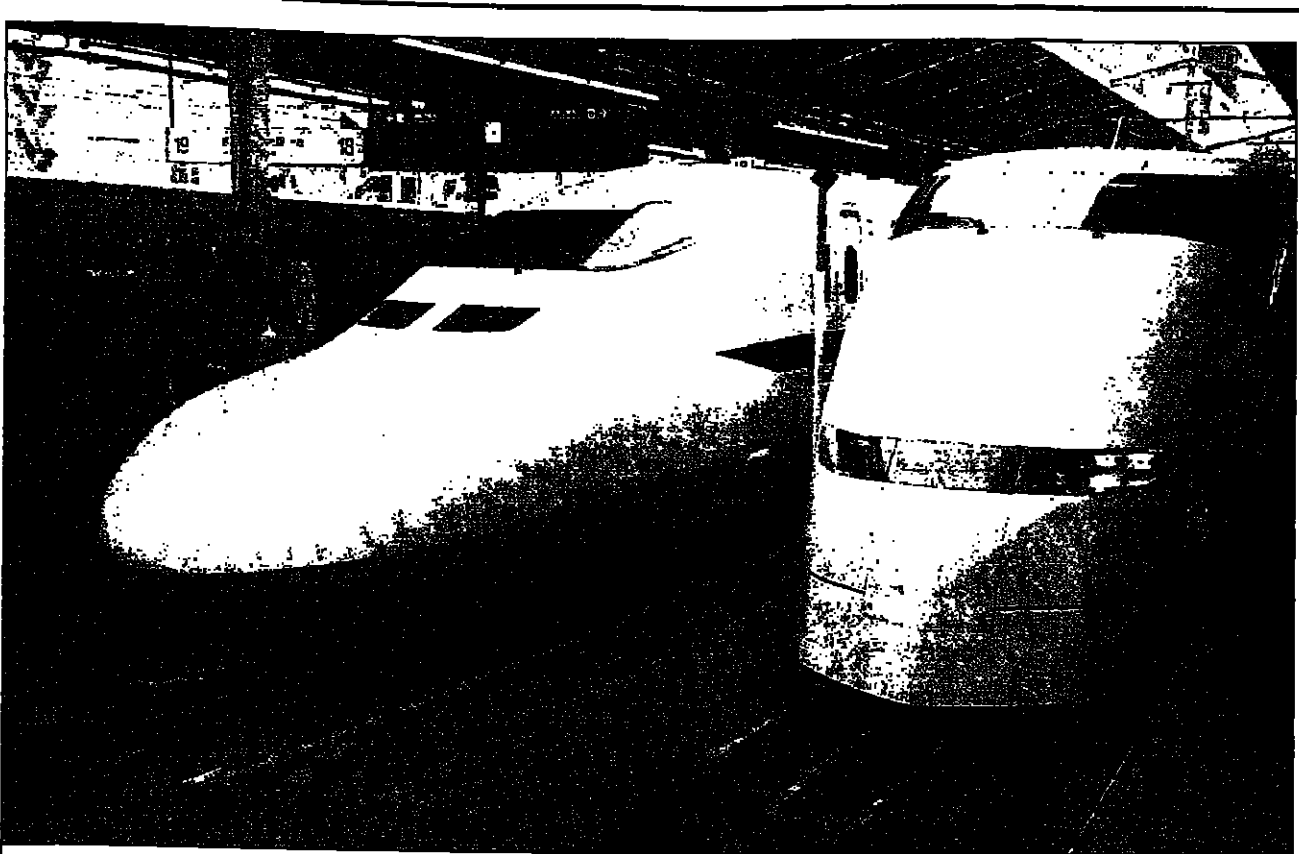
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Italy's verdict on the Prowler

Italy's verdict on the Prowler

Italy's verdict on the Prowler

World News



People crowd around new 700 series Nozomi bullet train next to an older 300 series (right) at Tokyo railway station. The latest bullet train series, which was jointly developed by Central Japan Railway Co (JR Tokai) and West Japan Railway Co (JR West), began service between Tokyo and Fukuoka March 13. Dubbed the 'goose' because of its bill-shaped front section, the train can travel at a top speed of 285 kilometres per hour (Reuters photo)

Italian military say fatal flight not authorised

ROME (AP) — The marine jet that severed a cable, sending a lift full of skiers plunging to their deaths last year, should not have been in the air at all, newspapers said Saturday, quoting Italian military investigators.

According to the reports, only F-16 fighter jets were authorised to fly in the area of the Alps where the Feb. 3, 1998, accident took place. All 20 people aboard the gondola died.

The fatal flight was made by a marine EA-6B Prowler, a low-level reconnaissance aircraft, piloted by Capt. Richard Ashby, who was acquitted last week by a military court in the United States.

The verdict has outraged Italy, where investigators are still looking into the accident.

Premier Massimo D'Alema has called repeatedly for justice in the case and said Italy may want to change its base agreements with NATO.

An Italian prosecutor had hoped to try the Prowler's crew in Italy, but the United States took jurisdiction under a NATO treaty. Ashby's acquittal has spurred Italian investigators to continue their probe.

The daily newspaper La Stampa said Saturday that Italy limited flights in the area of the accident to F-16 aircraft in 1997 because of complaints about the noise of lower-level flights. As a result, it said, quoting military investigators, the fatal Prowler flight was unauthorized.

The Prowler was on a training mission out of Aviano Air Base at the foothills of the Italian Alps when it severed the cable, sending the Gondola plunging to the valley floor.

Residents near Aviano have renewed their bid to have the government ban all military flights in the surrounding Alpine valleys since Ashby's acquittal.

The Prowler's navigator, Capt. Joseph Schweitzer, still faces charges. A decision is expected Monday on whether he will stand trial.

U.N. leaves Angola, denies failure

LUANDA (R) — The United Nations pulls out of Angola next week frustrated by the country's slide back into civil war after 10 years of peacekeeping effort.

The U.N. is scheduled to make a full withdrawal from the southwest African country by March 20, following the Security Council's decision last month not to renew the peacekeeping mandate of the U.N. Observer mission in Angola (MONUA), saying there was no more peace left to keep.

Government forces and rebels of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) began fighting again late last year, shattering a 1994 peace agreement designed to end more than 20 years of civil war.

President Jose Eduardo dos Santos has since December called repeatedly for the U.N. to pull out of Angola saying the world body watched UNITA remobilise and did nothing to stop it.

But the head of the U.N. in Angola says the body has not failed or given up.

"Yes, we didn't cross the finish line, we did not impose total peace in Angola, yes we are frustrated," Issa Diallo told Reuters Friday, three days before leaving the country for good.

"But you cannot say we have not tried and you cannot say that we have failed."

The U.N. came to Angola in 1989 to oversee the withdrawal of Cuban troops who had backed the government during the cold war.

It has steadily cut back its forces since 1997, when peace prospects looked solid.

From a peak of 7,000 observers, numbers were cut to 1,000.

Now there are about 150 military and 200 civilians left, all of whom are scheduled to leave, along with most U.N. military equipment, within four to six months of the March deadline.

Diallo, who became head of MONUA last year after the previous special representative, Alioune Blondin Beye, died in a plane crash in June, insisted that the international community's role in Angola was not yet dead.

He suggested the combined weight of the U.N., the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the 14-nation Southern African Development Community (SADC) could in time help solve Angola's decades-old conflict.

"I am convinced that if they (the organisations) decided to work together, enough pressure could be applied at all levels to stop the war... We have to think of whatever means for peace we have in our hands and use it."

The SADC is bitterly divided over peacekeeping operations, with main player South Africa against the military intervention in the democratic republic of the Congo by Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia to support President Laurent Kabila against rebels.

Conscious that government coffers cannot afford to fund a war and handle an enormous and growing humanitarian crisis, Dos Santos has asked U.N. aid workers and other non-governmental organisations to stay behind.

The U.N. will shortly appoint a new special representative, based in New York, who will make regular trips to Angola and try to keep up dialogue with the government and the troops of nations which oversees the collapsed 1994 agreement — the United States, Portugal and Russia.

Former head of Spanish state security held in death probe

BILBAO, Spain (AFP) — The former chief of Spain's state security was detained here Saturday in connection with the 1984 assassination of a leading Basque separatist, a court source said.

An investigating magistrate accused Julian Sancristobal of having ordered the murder of Dr. Santiago Brouard and financed it from secret interior ministry funds.

Brouard, a leader of the Basque separatist coalition Herri Batasuna, the political arm of the ETA rebels, was shot dead with a sawn-off rifle in February 1984 at his paediatric clinic in the northern town of Bilbao.

Sancristobal, who headed state security between 1984 and 1986, was a close associate of then interior minister, Jose Barrionuevo, himself jailed for his role in the anti-terrorist "dirty war" in the 1980s.

The court sentenced Sancristobal and Barrionuevo, among others, to 10-year prison terms, but released them in December under a partial government amnesty.

They had been jailed in July 1998 for their role in the 1983 kidnapping of a Frenchman, Segundo Marey, by an elite "death squad" set up to combat Basque separatist rebels.

The unit, known as the Anti-terrorist Liberation Groups (GAL), was also suspected of 28 assassinations of armed Basque ETA separatists during the 1980s, especially in the Basque region of southwestern France.

Until now, the inquiry had not determined whether it was the GAL that had killed Santiago Brouard or simply a squad of maverick paramilitary police.

But new evidence given 15 years after the fact by the man who supplied the fatal weapon, Juan Jose Rodriguez Diaz — known as "El Frances," or the Frenchman — prompted the magistrate to reopen the case.

El Frances agreed to provide damning testimony, his lawyer said, because the ex-officials had stopped "buying his silence" after many years.

The magistrate, Jose Luis Gonzalez Armengol, on Saturday also ordered two other ex-officials thrown in jail.

The two — Rafael Mesa, the former chief of the civil guard, and a former police chief Jose Amedo — are accused of organising the material details in Brouard's assassination. Amedo was among the officials convicted last summer.

The magistrate Wednesday also reincarcerated the second of two suspected assassins, Luis Morcillo, free on bail since the fall of 1998. Rafael Lopez Ocano, the first presumed assassin, is serving a 33-year prison term.

Sancristobal and the other suspects have systematically denied any involvement in the Brouard assassination.

Saturday's arrests followed the capture in France of the suspected military leader of ETA Javier Arizcuren Ruiz, one of Spain's most wanted men, as well as suspected Basque separatists caught with more than 300 kilograms of bomb-making chemicals.

Although ETA declared a ceasefire in mid-September, violent attacks have continued.

Newspaper reports Saturday alleged that an ETA faction the "commando Donosti" was planning to blow up a school bus carrying the children of civil guards by placing a bomb-laden automobile in its path.

A homemade bomb exploded Friday night at front door to the office of a socialist city councillor in Ordizia, in northern Basque country. Although no one was harmed in the attack, the councillor, Manuel Ros, had been targeted in a January bomb blast as well.

Also Friday in Basque country a local official of Madrid's ruling Popular Party was mailed a bomb-laden book, which did not explode. It was the latest of several intimidation attacks against elected centre-right officials.

The ETA, which stands for Basque Homeland and Liberty, declared the ceasefire after 30 years of violence in which nearly 1,000 people have died. It reiterated its pledge for peace last month.

Dalai Lama calls for settlement of Tibet issue

DHARMSALA, India (AP) — The Dalai Lama said Saturday the current status quo on Tibet was not going to help China or the outside world, including India.

"Tibet today is a blot on the human face of democracy," the spiritual leader said in his speech at a two-day conference in the northern Indian town of Dharmasala called to discuss the need for a zone of peace along the Sino-Indian border.

He again forswore independence for Tibet if China would grant genuine autonomy for Tibetans to safeguard their unique culture.

"India is a teacher of Buddhism and Tibet a student. The Tibetans presently are undergoing sufferings. So I feel it is the responsibility of the teacher to help the good students," said the Dalai Lama.

Dharmasala is the headquarters of the Tibetan government-in-exile.

The conference is being held three days after the Tibetans observed the 40th anniversary of their ill-fated 1959 revolt and a Chinese crackdown that prompted the Dalai Lama to escape by horseback into exile in India. More than 100,000 refugees followed the Tibetan spiritual leader into exile.

China claims Tibet was historically a Chinese province, but Tibetans say they were independent for generations.

The conference has been organised by the Akhila Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, or ABVP, the student affiliate of governing Bharatiya Janata Party. Nearly 300 students, politicians and delegates attended Saturday's session.

Hemendra Kumar, general secretary of the ABVP, said it was important for India's security to have an independent Tibet.

"It would be a buffer state between India and China." "We want the Indian government to take a stance on an independent Tibet," he said.

India and China fought a war in 1962 over a territorial claim.

Hollywood star Richard Gere said Tibet was an enormous issue.

"Borders surrounding Tibet are in precarious situation right now and have a huge effect on the whole world."

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Formidable tasks await new government

THE GOVERNMENT of Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh will not be taken by surprise by the economic problems which awaits the new ministers. The prime minister and his entire team are well-informed and sufficiently aware of the difficult situation they have to deal with, and the formidable obstacles lying ahead. They may indeed have well thought out plans of action to deal with these problems both now and further down the road.

Many problems have been with us for a long time. Unemployment for instance is currently hovering around 25 per cent, and is especially acute among young graduates. Poverty is covering an increasing proportion of the population and may exceed 30 per cent of all families. Other problems are getting worse with time, e.g. the water shortage, which is about to reach a stage of crisis. To make things even worse, we are in the midst of a very dry season.

helping himself first in a visible way. The new government has the burden of alleviating poverty, reducing unemployment, managing the water crisis, and resuming economic growth, but how? The prime minister promised to act within two weeks, but what are his options? Most likely the government will move fast on two levels: externally, seeking direct and indirect assistance from the Gulf states, other donors, and international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). At this level, the government will ask for financial aid in the form of grants and soft loans, open markets for Jordanian exports, and some

Sunday's Economic Pulse



Dr. Fahed Fanek

degree of priority in the Gulf labour market. The other level is domestic, where the government will have to control the labour market, and guarantee the priority of Jordanians over guest workers for available jobs. It has to

encourage investment by cutting red tape and accommodating the demands of potential investors. Some projects must move immediately, especially if related to water supplies. Privatisation has to move forcefully as the only way to attract investments, obtain foreign exchange and acquire new technology. As far as tight monetary policy is concerned, the government will have to move cautiously, and refrain from pressuring the Central Bank to ease its hand on credit and interest rates until such time when its net reserve is well above the \$1.5 billion mark. Furthermore, the government will have to fight vigorously for free access to the Palestinian market and even for some kind of exemption from the sanctions still imposed on Iraq for reasons no longer valid.

Internet ready?

JORDAN TELECOMMUNICATION Corporation (JTC) is once again in the limelight following the abrupt resignation of its board chairman Ali Shukri over policy differences with the new government. What is at stake is the privatisation of JTC, the continuation of the project to connect some 755 public schools to Internet and the launching of a wider mobile phone service. All other issues, albeit important, can be handled and dealt with in accordance with sound financial ground rules. Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh confirmed before Parliament a few days ago that on this basis, his government will proceed with full speed.

We have no quarrels with the plan to privatise JTC to take it smoothly into the post-monopoly era. The country has already gone through a lengthy debate about the old-new question of acquiring a so-called strategic partner, and the national decision was to refrain from such a course due to the Kingdom's strategic interest in keeping a close watch over its communication networks. We trust this part of the issue will not be reopened. Also a recent assessment of the firm conducted by Arthur Andersen advised against taking on a strategic partner at this time.

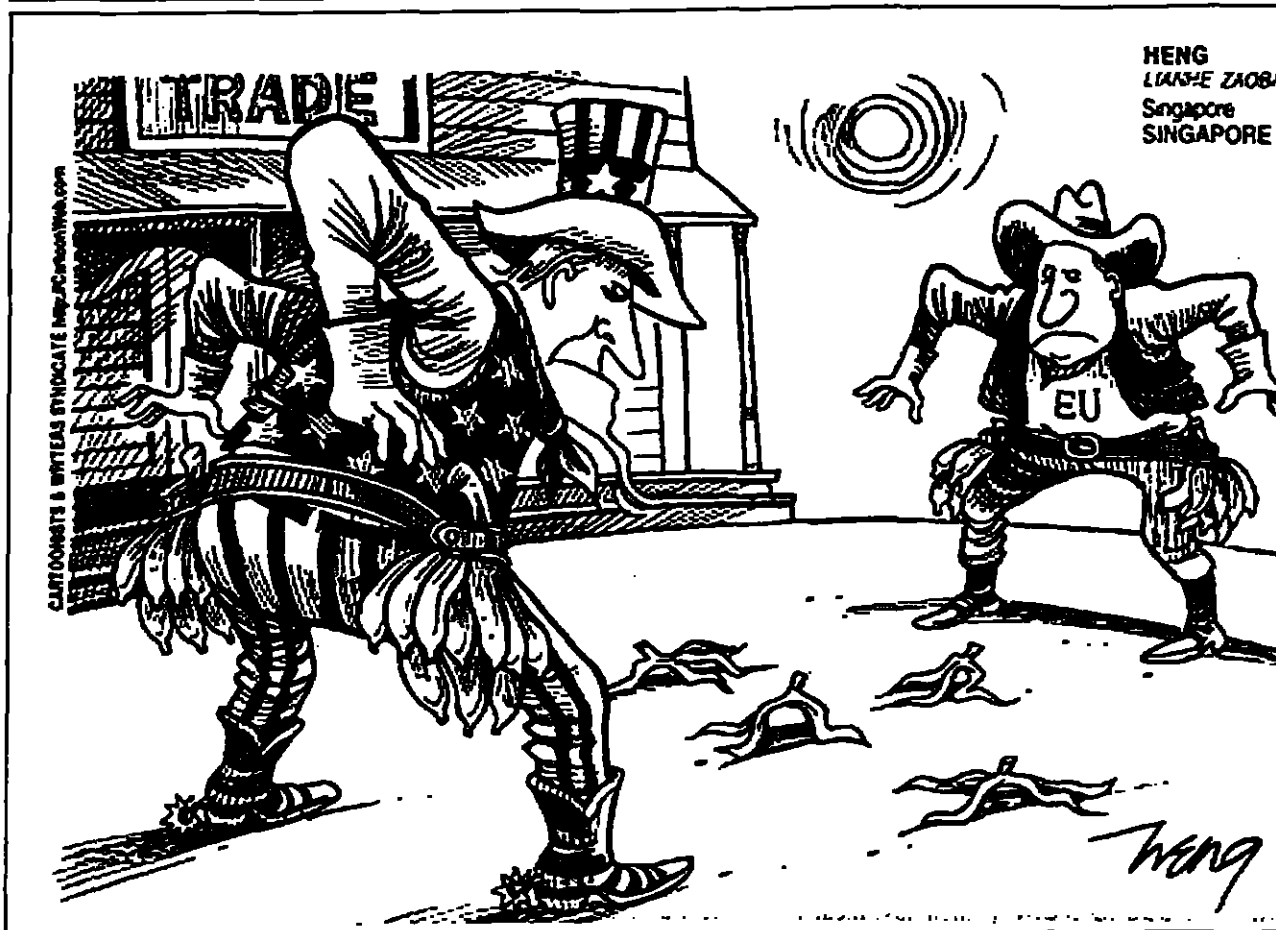
Connecting over 700 public schools to Internet is certainly a commendable objective. All schools, whether public or private, should have access to information networks in order to keep abreast of changes in the world on all levels. Yet at a closer look, we wonder if the current realities of our public schools would justify an immediate Internet connection. The public education sector suffers from a variety of deficiencies which are more basic and pressing, chief among them the quality of teaching and the public school curricula. At present, only a handful of private schools have Internet service to students. If these schools cannot cope with Internet because of the associated expenses related to this service, we wonder how public schools would be able to afford it.

An examination of the cost of Internet connection might prove useful. Then the government could introduce Internet gradually with the improvement of our schools' infrastructures.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Fanek said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is losing sleep over the Israeli Islamic movement's announcement that it was boycotting the elections. In fact, the Islamic movement's position is a present to Netanyahu's Likud Party, argued Fanek: The Arab votes that will thus be lost would have been against the prime minister, so the decision is not only negative but clearly favours Netanyahu's winning. Although, it is clear that the Islamists' objective was not to grant Israeli legitimacy through participation, they should recognise that they are part of the system, to which they pay taxes, and they hold Israeli passports, said Fanek, arguing that the Jewish state in fact suffers from the problem of legitimacy, and therefore seeks Arab recognition. The Islamic movement in Israel is a political one, and in politics, decisions should be judged by their practical results and not by their intentions, thus, the boycott does not compromise Israel's legitimacy, but serves the extreme Israeli right and Netanyahu, said Fanek.

Al Ra'i's Mahmoud Rimawi said that though there are no clear indications of the real reasons behind U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen's visit, observers noted the official's statements about forcing a change in the Iraqi regime, continuing the strikes and unifying the opposition. Cohen's "language" ignored the role of the U.N. and UNSCOM as the U.S. is about to deal with situation differently; there are rumours about a U.S. offer to provide the Gulf states with weapons, said Rimawi. Efforts to change the situation might exceed military escalation or striking at certain targets in Iraq, and although Jordan called on Cohen to deal with the problem through diplomacy, the defence secretary's pronouncements showed no signs of political solutions, said the writer. Worse was Cohen's meeting with the Israeli government, which refuted all reports of "cold" relations, he said. The U.S. has no right to determine other countries' fate, but such actions hold a clear message to all Arabs: don't "mess" with the superpower, or "punishment" will be forthcoming, Rimawi concluded.



Letter from Belfast

The loss of a dear friend

By Peter Hinchcliffe

IT WAS sad and traumatic to observe from the distance of Northern Ireland the unfolding tragic drama surrounding the last return to Jordan by His late Majesty King Hussein. So immediate, so comprehensive and so complementarily effusive was the coverage in the British press that everyone realised that they had lost someone they could think of as a dear friend. I had a small part to play. Knowing of my time in Jordan as British Ambassador in the mid-nineties I was used by the local media as an 'expert' and as a commentator. For one radio broadcast on Radio Ulster (the local BBC station) I was asked to watch a live TV feed of the late King's funeral into the studio and then try to describe what I could see to a radio audience. This was simultaneously an uplifting and saddening experience.

Uplifting at the pride I felt of seeing so many world leaders paying their last respects to a giant, in terms of achievement and commitment, from a little country. Saddening because I too felt I had lost a friend. Amidst all his preoccupations during his stopover in England on his way back to Jordan supposedly cured of his cancer, King Hussein found the time to write to me. He said that he felt so much buoyed up by all the prayers and messages of support he had received whilst in the Mayo Clinic. He now had to return to his country to continue the tasks he had set himself. He hoped that next time he came to the U.K. we could meet, perhaps up at my home in Scotland. Alas that was not to be. But I will always treasure his letter.

So many ordinary people in Northern Ireland seemed to have stories about King Hussein. Amongst them a 'radio ham' — an amateur short wave wireless operator — recalled the times he had 'spoken' to the King on the airwaves. He only knew him by his call sign: 'Jordan One'. Another was an employee of Girvan, the Belfast based company employed by the late King to regild the golden dome of Al Aqsa Mosque. He recalled how enthusiastic King Hussein had been about this job and how appreciative his remarks about the quality of the work. He had taken the trouble to invite senior members of the company to Amman to thank them personally for a job well done. This during a major crisis in the peace process. But that gift of the human touch was

one of King Hussein's greatest characteristics. By coincidence, I had undertaken to give a lecture at a university in Dublin on "King Hussein's Jordan." The title was chosen in the middle of last year. As chance would have it I had to deliver my talk three days after the funeral. In the audience there were 8 young Jordanian students studying medicine in Ireland. They were in deep mourning but felt that by coming to listen to me somehow they were keeping in touch with their own country. They had kind words about what I had to say but their raw emotions and a palpable sense of loss reached out to me throughout my lecture. Some of the time I could see them weeping and I had a tremendous struggle not to join them in tears. But somehow I struggled on. Another person in the audience was also visibly moist-eyed as I spoke. It transpired that he was the newly-appointed Israeli ambassador to Ireland. He told me after my talk that he too felt a great sense of loss at the departure of one of the great strugglers for peace.

With King Hussein buried and honoured, the Middle East has almost disappeared from the news. Certainly from the headlines. The death of Sheikh Issa of Bahrain, attracted little coverage. Of course we have our own peace process here which like 'yours' in the Middle East staggers on from crisis to crisis but at least the progress is measurable and optimism appears justifiable. But how about yours? News here to be news must usually be bad to get a mention in our parochial press. So all we have had is a feeling of stalemate because of the Israeli elections punctuated by reports of acts of violence — either in the West Bank or in southern Lebanon.

Thankfully, I am not entirely dependent on the British media. Nor even the Internet which I daily surf looking for some good news from the West Bank. I am getting my own personal feed at the moment. My wife Archie is running a course for Palestinian paediatric physiotherapists at the Princess Basma Centre in East Jerusalem. I asked her about optimism about peace amongst her "pupils." Sadly, she reports a strong feeling of hopelessness. The increasing security stranglehold is suffocating the lives of ordinary people. Physios from Ramallah and Hebron and Bethlehem face a daily struggle to reach East Jerusalem to attend the course. This perhaps would not matter so much if there

'Perceptions matter so much in the resolution of conflict... If most people do not believe that a solution can be found and therefore have no hope of one emerging, they will almost certainly be proved right. Sometimes, sadly, dead right'

was a chink of light at the end of the peace process tunnel. If there is, no one she talks to appears to be glimpsing it. Expectations seem dreadfully low never mind who wins the elections in May. Experience is triumphing over hope. Here in Northern Ireland, all the difficulties notwithstanding, the reverse still applies.

Perceptions matter so much in the resolution of conflict. Is your glass half full or half-empty is one way of looking at it. Conflicts like Palestine, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, South Africa before, can look hopeless and often are for so long. One thing is sure. If most people do not believe that a solution can be found and therefore have no hope of one emerging, they will almost certainly be proved right. Sometimes, sadly, dead right.

I plan to be in Jordan in May to visit old friends. See some of you then. In the meanwhile, the next letter will be from Scotland.

The writer, a retired diplomat, was the British ambassador to Jordan until March, 1997

Letters to the editor

A project for future generations

MANY COUNTRIES in the world are investing human and financial resources in the computer industry and technology these days, because they know it is the future of economy and trade.

Recently, the British government announced that it was going to allocate 1.7 billion pounds (\$2.8 billion) of its budget to promote the introduction of computer information technology to all sectors of the producing bodies in Britain and especially schools and colleges. The justification for this is that mastering the Internet, e-commerce and other computer-based work is necessary to face the economic challenges of the 21st century, and that this technology is the future of the world economy. Aren't they right?

Our late and very much missed King Hussein had ordered, last January, that all 755 public schools in the Kingdom be connected to the Internet. He had foreseen that introducing all the young people of this country to this new and rapidly developing technology would ensure that Jordan in the near future will not be outcast from trade and other activities in relation to the rest of the world. In a way, he was ensuring that these kids would have jobs in the near future if they got involved and mastered the technology. Certainly, the King was wise, erudite and visionary. He could see that mastering all the intricacies of the computer technology was a key to open many doors in the future working lives of all involved people.

Unbelievably, some of our legislators, who are supposed to be the sharp eyes that watch the deeds of every government in this country, the representatives who are supposed to be visionary, well-informed, deep-thinkers and rational came forward without hesitation and claimed, in Parliament and on TV, that this project, connecting schools to the Internet, was extravagant. Can you believe that any sensible person would make such an announcement? He has to be someone who has closed himself to the outside world.

Is a project like this, that will connect us and keep us and our economy at pace with the rest of the world really extravagant? I think it is extravagant and unnecessary for this country to have people like these in our legislature.

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The lesson from Britain

I AM writing with regard to Bageen's letter entitled "Education and a high-skill society" (JT, March 10).

I agree with Bageen about the efficiency of adapting the British education system in some respects and not all. It is a great idea to adapt the elasticity and the depth of the curricula and the syllabi of their system, because it educates and teaches students how to educate themselves and seek knowledge independently of a teacher. At the same time, the role of the teacher is not abolished completely — it is only kept to minimal: without a guide the educational process would tend to cease. The system allows students to graduate not only educated but knowledgeable as well.

We (in Jordan) should aim at such a target, but it will not be achieved by the Ministry of Education alone: the nuclear family has an important role. Parents should teach and encourage their children from a young age how to adopt reading as a habit. They also should be selective with what their children read.

Assuming that parents are ready to teach this to their offspring, the question of where we get books from arises. If the government would fund public libraries the problem would seem to be resolved. Also, book prices must be brought down so that books will be accessible to more purchasers.

The media, too, plays a very important role. Moreover, students must learn how to search for the validity of a piece of information. They should be prepared to question rather than believe something is right simply because the teacher said so.

We should never be satisfied by what knowledge we have. We cannot obtain all the knowledge in the world, yet we can seek as much as possible. Seeking knowledge is approved in the Koran and by the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him).

Going back to Bageen's letter, I would like to say that British Prime Minister Tony Blair's proposal is not expected to work by many British students and British parents that I come across every day.

Their pessimism comes from the fact that the Labour Government introduced university fees, which the British have never paid before. Many say that they are not prepared to pay these fees since they believe that education is a right, not a privilege.

A second slap in the face came when Labour showed tendency to abolish student grants — which students use to support themselves financially. Virtually every student has a grant whether poor or rich!

Now, this system may be applicable successfully to Britain or other nations, but it does not mean it is applicable to us. We have got to have our own blend. But it is very important to analyse the present problems in our system carefully, and then decide what action should be taken. It should be noted also that such an analysis is one in which all society's sectors should participate. Feedback from students should be taken into account.

If we are highly determined and devoted to improve the educational system as well as ourselves, we can, and then a high-skill society will be obtained.

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NATO flips from peacekeeping to privatisation

By Douglas Hamilton
Reuters

"PROSPERITY CAN be contagious and we want to infect you," the four-star general told an audience of cautious bankers and anxious stock traders.

"We want to infect you with the knowledge of how an entrepreneurial system can function and we want to spread that knowledge throughout the whole region," General Wesley Clark, NATO's supreme commander in Europe, was not proposing a sell-off of the Atlantic alliance. His aim, at an unusual gathering in the Hague last week, was to promote economic self-interest and the tools to make it work.

Most experts agree that the Western allies are staring down a tunnel of open-ended commitment in former Yugoslavia unless they can awaken the entrepreneurial spirit.

Bosnia has already swallowed up three years of vast amounts of aid and expenditure for military and political stability, without reaching take off

velocity for self-sufficiency. Now Kosovo looks as if it may be next in line for protectorate status.

"Military and political stability are only part of the equation," Clark said. "It's a three-legged stool and the leg that's missing is economic development. That's a basic underpinning of peace." This was the message going out to about 40 business and government leaders and young hopefuls on a visit from the Yugoslav Republic of Montenegro.

Instead of lecturing them, the U.S. Institute for Defence Analysis, NATO and the George C. Marshall European Centre for Security Studies joined forces to try an experimental computer game that would put theory to the test, with instant feedback.

"Recent experience indicates that the leaders of these newly democratic nations must develop an understanding of how a free market economy works, interacts with, and is affected by political and military policies..." the organisers said.

"Rather than wait for the conse-

quences of business and political decisions to develop slowly, leaders can immediately see how their actions affect the economic and political health of a computer simulated nation."

Like pilots in a flight simulator, the Montenegro team were seated in whirling clusters around banks of computers, with advisers and observers from the World Bank and the IMF waiting to see how they would run a country.

They were given Akrona, a mythical small Central European nation recently emerged from a state of ethnic conflict — not unlike Bosnia, on which the game and the lifelike data it uses were based.

Some of the players handled banking, some government and some private investment.

With months flying by in the space of five minutes game time, they got through eight years of recovery, reconstruction and development, and left their fictitious country well on the way to a prosperous future.

"Some of them went away on a real high. And we were pleased to see that what we have is a very powerful methodology," said Loren Diederichsen, the general manager of NATO's Consultation, Command and Control, which hosted the exercise.

"The general consensus was that they had learned a great deal about how a market economy actually works and what can go wrong," Diederichsen added.

"For example, the 'government' sat on a lot of cash rather than granting tax relief. One 'banker' thought his job was to support government policy, until he was told it was to make money."

"In some cases it was clear they should have reduced import tariffs, and that would have increased revenues very rapidly."

They saw the consequences of deficit spending but they also learned the value of boosting literacy and life expectancy. Cash inflows disappeared and inflation bounced around threateningly for a while as Akrona's

government kept to a tight lending policy and frantic investors scrambled to raise money to buy into lucrative telecommunications privatisation.

"If we don't have decent phones to let people call home who is going to come here and feed our tourist industry?" asked one player clearly intent on winning.

Unlike a university text-book course, the U.S.-designed computer model, appearing in the Hague on its first foreign trial, was able to track the effects of each decision 'month by month', or every five computer minutes, giving the participants a chance to change tack and avert a crash if they misjudged.

"This is very good stuff," said 32-year-old Sasa Markovic, a political adviser to Montenegro's opposition Liberal Alliance.

"It proves what we in our party say, that (Montenegro's President Milo) Djukanovic needs to move much faster and be far more radical in his economic reforms." Years of international isolation, sanctions and even the threat of

NATO bombing have so far failed to budge the socialist dominated federal government of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic from his narrow, nationalist course.

Organisers said Montenegro was not chosen as the trial audience for this reason. But a few hoped privately that an example of rapid economic success in the neighbourhood might make a big difference to attitudes.

As Yugoslavia's smallest republic, with only 600,000 people and a small slice of Adriatic coast, mountainous Montenegro is pursuing a determinedly pro-Western course, despite the chafing with Belgrade this causes.

"My party wants an independent Montenegro," Markovic said.

"We don't want to be a hostage to Serbian-Albanian hatred (in Kosovo). We want to catch up with the world."

Chanteuse of dreams

Umm Kulthoum still stirs sentiments
24 years after her death

By Scott Macleod

THE CONCERT hall is hushed. The legend glides onto the stage. Before she sings a single note, the audience is awed by her allure: the sequined gown, the diamond earrings, the scarf in her hand that she will shake to the music. Then the soaring voice thrills her fans, including millions in tea-houses and homes listening on the radio: she relentlessly tugs at the heartstrings in songs lasting an hour and sometimes three.

The singer is the incomparable Umm Kulthoum. The concert is the one that took place in Cairo on the first Thursday night of every month for four decades, often in the presence of President Gamal Abdul Nasser, or his successor, Anwar Sadat. Those Egyptian leaders left the scene long ago, but not so Umm Kulthoum, who remains the Arab World's most beloved chanteuse even though she died in 1975. Her CDs still sell briskly in bazaars from Dubai to Marrakech. Titles like *Anta Omri* (You Are My Life), *Hathihi Layleni* (This is My Night) and *Aala Bab Misr* (On Egypt's Doorstep) sell at the staggering rate of 600,000 discs per year according to her Cairo distributor. That puts Umm Kulthoum among the top-selling Arab singers, and has done so for more than 50 years.

Across the Middle East this year, Egyptian TV will broadcast Umm Kulthoum: An Era of Art, a 30-part drama retelling the diva's rags-to-riches story to commemorate the centenary of her birth. The government will also open the Umm Kulthoum Museum in Cairo, containing recordings of her 300 songs, prints of her six films and thousands of her personal possessions.

Umm Kulthoum was a brilliant performer who captured the mood of her times. "In those days, if we managed to dance cheek-to-cheek with a girl at a party, we would dream about it for weeks," recalls actor Omar Sharif, a fan since his teenage days in Cairo. "Umm Kulthoum expressed our love, our romance, our longing."

Her story of the country girl turned city princess has always been dear to Egyptians' hearts. Born in the village of Tamay Al Zahraya on the Nile River north of Cairo, Umm Kulthoum's musical days began as a child when her father, a local imam, dressed her as a boy and made her a member of his troupe that performed songs on religious holidays. After discovering the girl's remarkable talent, an Egyptian composer set her on a career that enabled her unique style to develop. "Her voice, her delivery, her body language, they were incredible," recalls Samir Gharib, who is overseeing the Umm Kulthoum Museum. "She hypnotised her audiences."

Her breakthrough occurred in 1927 when one of her ballads became a national hit. Later, her close association with Nasser, the Arab nationalist who overthrew the



Umm Kulthoum in a scene from the 1945 film, *Salama* (file photo)

monarchy in 1952, sent her popularity rocketing. Nasser turned one of her martial songs, *Wallaah Zamaan Ya Silaati* (It's Been a Long Time, O Weapon of Mine) into the Egyptian national anthem — though it was replaced in 1977 after Nasser's successor opened peace talks with Israel.

Some intellectuals complained that her songs encouraged complacency and Nasser's reckless delusions of grandeur. But the critics were silenced by the deafening applause. Although stunned by Egypt's crushing defeat by Israel in the 1967 war, she launched a concert tour which raised more than \$436,000 for the beleaguered treasury. The memorable performances lasted long into the night and set men weeping openly. Millions of grieving Egyptians filled the streets and formed a vast procession to the cemetery after Umm Kulthoum died in 1975, aged 76. "Her ability to unite the Arabs will always be remembered," says her stepson Mohammad Hefnawi. "They all loved Umm Kulthoum."

She was so beloved that when Egyptian TV director Anam Mohammed Ali announced plans for the TV series a heated controversy erupted over whether any living actress was worthy of the role. The director says she ruled out experienced actresses who had performed romantic parts lest the choice be deemed an insult to the icon's sacred memory.

Ali finally tapped Sabine, a young actress known for conservative film roles and a discreet private life. "I was frightened when I was selected," Sabine says. "I hope I will not let the viewers down." She has already taken an important precaution: although she is an able singer herself, the musical segments of the TV series will be dubbed with the authentic voice of Umm Kulthoum. As Sabine knows, the legend's fans would not have had it otherwise.

— Time Magazine

Is Leonardo's Last Supper lost for ever?

By Sara Marani
Reuters

AS RESTORATION of Leonardo Da Vinci's "Last Supper" enters its long overdue final phase after 20 years, art historians are still arguing over the wisdom and success of the project.

Is it a futile, misguided and unsuitable process which has tragically lost a masterpiece for the world and future generations? Or is it a wisely-chosen and well-justified solution to an almost insurmountable problem which, if left, would have deteriorated beyond hope of repair? Adding fuel to the debate has been a mass of criticism bemoaning the failure of the restoration team to complete the work in time to mark the fresco's 500th anniversary in 1997.

Since it was finished in 1497, the Last Supper has been copied endlessly. Tourists and art lovers flock in their thousands every year to see the fresco painted on the refectory wall of the Church of Santa Maria Delle Grazie in central Milan.

The painting shows Christ and his apostles at their last meal before he was crucified, at the moment when he announces one of the 12 will betray him.

From the instant the paint dried, the fresco began to deteriorate. Da Vinci was experimenting with untried techniques, but his technical knowledge did not match his artistic talent.

True fresco — fast painting on wet plaster — would have allowed the wall to breathe, but his technique produced a chemical reaction which made the paint peel off.

In the late 16th century it was already time for the first restoration, and there has been at least one every century since.

During the Napoleonic wars the refectory was used as a stable, and during World War II the church was heavily bombed.

Against all the odds, the Last Supper wall was left intact, but was exposed to rain and snow, leading to the restoration of 1946.

This was a hurried job, done with the means available at the time, and the result was deemed unsatisfactory.

In 1976 the Milan authorities decided to launch the most radical restoration yet, convincing the industrial group Olivetti to sponsor the project which has so far cost hundreds of billions of lire.

Several critics question the decision to remove all past retouchings and repaintings, saying at least those left the viewer with a clue to Leonardo's intentions, the colours and contrasts he used.

The person most in the firing line is restorer Pinin Brambilla Barillon, who has been working on the Last Supper since 1979. She could not be reached for comment.

Responding to previous criticism of her work, Brambilla has said: "I am at peace with what I have done here because I know I have worked honestly." Brambilla's knowledge and expertise are not under attack, rather the decisions taken.

"I'm not against her techniques, but I can say that the proper protocol wasn't followed in terms of approaching the programme," said Jacques Franck, who has devoted his life to studying Da Vinci and his techniques and is permanent consulting expert to the Armand Hammer Centre for Leonardo studies at the University of California in Los Angeles.



The Last Supper is now undergoing its last two months of restoration. The results are due to be unveiled on May 27 (file photo)

"They didn't organise a restoration committee, including Leonardo experts. If they had, they would have had the possibility of studying various solutions, instead they have adopted one which is not the proper one."

The restorers argue that Da Vinci's original work is indistinguishable under the various repaintings, so they decided the new restoration should go back to what the artist painted.

The slow process began by scraping off layer by layer.

Brambilla's aim was to remove all of the retouchings, to work through to Da Vinci's original brush strokes. In doing so, she says, the critics, the true colour and cohesion of the work have been lost.

"It certainly is not true to what Leonardo painted — about 90 per cent of what he painted has disappeared," says Franck.

"And when 90 per cent of the work is missing would you suppress all the old and historical repaintings knowing that anyway you will have to repaint? They should have tried to preserve what was left." But once the project was started it had to be carried on, and Brambilla did have the backing of a team of experts who supported her ambitious aim of returning to the original.

"This restoration puts Leonardo's brush strokes in evidence for the first time in five centuries. We can see Leonardo's hand at work," said Pietro Marani, the restoration project's co-director.

When experts were invited to see the progress of the restoration, the result was a cocktail of disaster and scandal.

"When I saw it I was shocked, nothing was left of it," said Franck. "Nothing was left of the head of Christ except tiny bits of the beard and the hair and no other shape to be seen." To her credit, Brambilla has managed to uncover several details, like minute flowers on the tapes-

tries, parts of sky and landscape, which had hitherto remained hidden.

But the cost, according to others, has been too great.

Martin Kemp, professor of history at Oxford University has said: "Several details have been found, but the overall effect has been lost." In returning to Da Vinci's brush work and removing all repainting in the process, Brambilla found herself faced with vast areas of empty gaps.

"Heads, hands and parts of drapery in which Leonardo used a lot of white pigments are strong and well-preserved," explained Marani.

"The other parts where greens, blues and minor colours prevail are less preserved because they didn't attach to the walls. The areas where colour was missing was disturbing, so we decided to fill it in with neutral water-colours."

But for some experts that is precisely the root of the problem. Leonardo painted using strong colours, stark contrasts, and now what visitors see is a pale, misty image.

"What we have is a modernist vision bearing no resemblance to the art practised by Leonardo," maintains Franck.

"So, however, honest the original intention of the restoration was it has failed in letting the true Leonardo emerge in the end." Experts agree there is no perfect solution to restoration.

And while Brambilla has no doubt done the best she could, the art world will always be asking whether it was the best that could have been done for the masterpiece.

The Last Supper is due to close this month for the last two months of the restoration ahead of opening on May 27.

"It has to be ready, there's no choice, that's what's been decided," said one of Brambilla's assistants.

James Bond stirred but not shaken by the Caspian oil game

By David Stern
Agence France Presse

TO THE list of world leaders and petroleum executives lobbying for a oil pipeline from the Caspian's billion-dollar offshore fields through Turkey, add one more name. Bond. James Bond.

The international martini drinker and bon vivant has jumped with both feet into the Caspian oil game and will visit the Azeri capital in April for the latest in the lucrative cloak-and-dagger thrillers, the film's producers say.

In "The World Is Not Enough," Bond's latest incarnation, Irish-born actor Pierce Brosnan, fights an international group of bad

guys intent on dominating the production and transport of the world's oil supply.

In addition to Azerbaijan's Oily Rocks — a gargantuan Soviet-era oil facility built from hundreds of causeways in the Caspian Sea — Bond will visit the French Alps, Spain's Basque Country and Turkey's Bosphorus.

He is joined by French actress Sophie Marceau — who plays Elektra King, "a daughter of a murdered oil tycoon Bond is hired to protect" — and British actress Denise Richards, Robert Carlyle from "The Full Monty" plays the villain.

Those involved with the project say they cannot give away the film's entire plot, but they do reveal that the agent from Her Majesty's Secret Service will defend the concept of a trans-Turkish pipeline.

"James Bond is supporting the idea of constructing a pipeline through Turkey to

the Black Sea and the Mediterranean," said Ali Hoomani, a U.S.-Iranian businessman who is organising the Azerbaijani segment of the film.

Hoomani was quick to add that the film does not get involved in the current debate raging over what route a pipeline should take to the Turkish Mediterranean coast of Ceyhan or Supsa on the Black Sea.

"The film does not mention any names. It is not that political," he said.

But the film's producers admit that this might perhaps deal with current issues more than any of the series' previous 18 productions, which began with adaptations of the works of Bond's creator Ian Fleming before taking on a life of their own.

"Each Bond story tries to have a storyline in today's news," said Geoff Freeman at Eon Productions, which is producing

the movie along with the U.S.-based MGM/United Artists. "In the last Bond movie it was the power of the international media, before that, it was the Berlin Wall coming down and the coming together of agencies," he added.

"But it is interesting how political this story is for the news today," he said. Production on the movie has already begun and will continue until May, Freeman added.

The film's backers say that they are not afraid that events will overtake the plotting and render real life details obsolete by the time of release in November this year.

Negotiations over an actual pipeline's routing have reached deadlock and a decision may be put off until the end of the year, as world oil prices have plummeted and questions arisen over the Caspian's actual oil reserves.

Eon Productions' Anne Bennett said that the movie is mostly fantasy, so the stories in the news will only accentuate what takes place on the screen.

"People go to Bond films for many reasons," Bennett said. "Like any other Bond movie, this one will have exciting overseas locations, good action and a strong story line."

Hoomani also promised that the movie will not disappoint, offering up the usual mix of romance and death-defying stunts familiar to Bond viewers the world over.

But he added: "They say that this James Bond will be completely different from any other." Technically, the film will be very beautiful, Hoomani said, adding that Peter Lamont of "Titanic" fame would provide production design.

The majority of the Baku-based scenes, however, will be shot at Pinewood Studios

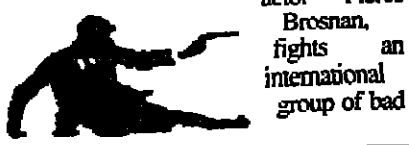
dios in London, the producers say. There, an enormous model of Oily Rocks will be built and all the interior shots will be filmed.

A camera crew will come to the former Soviet republic only for one or two days, to film the establishing shots. Nevertheless, close to one fifth of the movie is supposed to unfold on the shores of the Caspian.

Hoomani, who claims credit for enticing the James Bond franchise to film in Baku, sees the Bond picture as a positive event, since Azerbaijan will become a known quantity outside the oil industry.

"Some person sees that Pierce Brosnan is going to Azerbaijan and he gets interested," he said. "Brosnan in the movie calls it the 'oil and caviar capital'."

"The next time he hears about the country, he says 'Hey — I know Azerbaijan.'"



U.S. current account deficit hits record in 98

WASHINGTON (AFP)

The United States posted a record \$233.4 billion current account deficit in 1998, a 50 per cent jump from the \$155.2 billion shortfall in 1997, the Commerce Department has reported.

But the department also reported that in the fourth quarter the current account deficit narrowed to \$63.8 billion from \$65.7 billion in the third, reflecting a smaller gap between imports and exports of goods and services.

The current account deficit measures trade in goods and services along with profits made from overseas investments and interest payments.

U.S. officials have made no secret of their mounting concern over the deficit, fearing it will give rise to demands for protectionism in the Congress and elsewhere.

Speaking of the shortfall, U.S. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin said it was "enormously important" for the industrial powers to act together to combat a global growth slowdown, implying that the United States cannot continue as an importer of last — or only — resort.

The current situation "is not sustainable in the long-term, either economically or politically," he warned in a USA Today interview.

The smaller fourth quarter deficit was attributed by the Commerce Department to a narrowing in both the goods and services trade deficit and in the shortfall on investment income.

The deficit on goods and services came to \$43 billion in the fourth quarter, down from \$46.5 billion in the third.

The deficit on investment income shrank to \$7.8 billion in the fourth quarter from \$9.2 billion in the third.

Net unilateral transfers widened to \$13 billion in the fourth quarter from \$10 billion in the previous three-month period.

Net foreign private purchases of U.S. Treasury securities totalled \$24.3 billion from October to December, 1998, compared with net sales of \$1.4 billion in the third

quarter.

"In the fourth quarter, foreigners sought the safety and liquidity of U.S. Treasury securities," the department said.

But for the year, foreign purchases of Treasury securities were \$48.1 billion, down from \$146.7 billion in 1997.

"In 1998, net purchases by western Europe slowed sharply throughout the year, and highly leveraged international bond mutual funds were large net sellers in the second half," according to the department.

Foreign private purchases of U.S. securities other than Treasury notes came to \$49.2 billion in the fourth quarter, up from \$20 billion in the third.

For the year, foreign purchases of U.S. securities other than Treasuries totalled \$217.3 billion, up from \$196.8 billion in 1997.

Meanwhile, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) said the U.S. budget surplus will top two trillion dollars in the coming decade, hundreds of billions more than estimated only months ago.

In its outlook report for the next decade, the non-partisan office that studies the economy for Congress confirmed the rosier fiscal outlook signaled by President Bill Clinton in his recent State of the Union address.

Last August, the CBO was projecting a surplus of \$1.55 trillion over the next 10 years.

CBO Director June O'Neill, addressing the Senate Budget committee, said U.S. growth was expected to slow to around two per cent annually over the next two years but the economy would stay healthy.

"There is significant danger, however, that a worsening international financial situation or other developments could lead to a more precipitous slowdown," she warned, "which in turn could threaten the anticipated budget surpluses in the near term."

In 1998 the economy produced its first surplus in 30 years of \$70 billion.

Lebanon targets 40-45% budget deficit for 1999

BEIRUT (R) — The government set a budget deficit target between 40-45 per cent of spending for this year, senior officials at the finance ministry have said.

They said a budget proposal, which will be presented to parliament around the end of this month, contains tax increases necessary to help cover new spending in 1999.

Up to \$400 million of unpaid bills by the former government, which left office in December, will be dealt with outside the budget, the officials added.

"The deficit we worked out is an achievement considering the constraints we inherited and the extra expenses we had to take on this year," said one official who declined to be named.

"We approached the taxation issue logically and prevented the concentration of new taxes," he said without elaborating.

The budget deficit finished at 43 per cent last year. Around half of the budget goes towards debt service and more than a third is spent on salaries.

The finance ministry forecasts debt service to increase by around \$464 million this year and salaries by \$331 million after a pay rise approved by the former government took effect this year.

The 1999 budget report will "contain elements" of a five-year plan to bring down the deficit and reduce the national debt, including a value added tax that would come on stream in two years, said the official.

The national debt stood at \$17.1 billion at the end of last year — one of the highest in the world on a per capita basis.

Foreigners should tread softly in Asia — analyst

LOS ANGELES (R) — Foreign investors scavenging for bargains amid the rubble of Asia's financial crisis could spark nationalist backlashes that could alter the political landscape, an analyst who sparked controversy over alleged corruption in Indonesia has said.

The West could do more to uphold democracy and the rule of law in Asia, although implementing those ideas will likely be driven by popular demand rather than by foreign lecturing.

"In order to minimise hostility that has arisen,

and to keep it from snowballing, global capital needs to show it has an interest in long-term stability," said Jeffrey Winters, an associate professor of political economy at Chicago's Northwestern University.

"Long-term investors will be much more warmly received than the jump-in, make money off the devastation, jump-back-out kind," Winters said in an interview.

Winters has been embroiled in a controversy in Indonesia for raising questions last year of corruption by a top economic

official. Indonesia said in October it would ban him from the country, then said he would be allowed in for questioning over the alleged slander of its chief economics minister.

Foreign investors, many of whom fled the region when the economic woes started in 1997, have started eyeing Asian companies that are for sale for pennies on the dollar.

The quest for quick profits could stir up nationalist sentiment, however, in countries already smarting from having to accept handouts from international agencies after the col-

lapse of their once-vibrant economies, Winters said.

"It could engender a shift in tone of politics and make more viable extreme candidates and parties and policies that were not viable before," Winters said.

For instance, Indonesia could see the rise of a more radical form of Islam, Winters said. Former U.S. allies could distance themselves from Washington.

Winters pointed to the indignant backlash of many Americans against Japan in the 1980s when Japanese firms snapped up prime U.S. real estate.

"Americans seem to for-

get that sentiment when they run around the world buying up other people's assets," he said. "Nationalism still matters."

Resentment in Asia would be further sharpened by the perceived hypocrisy of Western nations, which often contradicted their free-market mantra, he said.

He pointed to demands from Washington that Asian countries allow bankrupt companies to fail and then turning around and bailing out the U.S.-based investment fund Long-Term Capital Management last year.

Latin American financial chiefs agree to differ on exchange rate systems

PARIS (AFP) — Latin American financial leaders agreed to differ here Saturday on the best way to stabilise exchange rates, with some suggesting that perhaps the world should have fewer currencies altogether.

Mexico's finance minister and Brazil's central bank governor insisted that free floating exchange rates were the best way to keep their economies healthy, but Argentinean Treasury Secretary Pablo Oudot defended his country's proposal to replace the peso with the U.S. dollar.

In the longer term, he said, it was all a question of the "efficiency" of the international monetary system, and perhaps in the future the world would contain far fewer currencies.

Inter American Development Bank (IDB) chief economist Ricardo Hausmann also suggested that perhaps one reason for recent problems with both fixed and floating exchange rate systems was that there were too many currencies.

Perhaps there is something wrong with a world that has "two aeroplane makers, two soft drink makers ... and 180 manufacturers of currency," he told a seminar on the sidelines of the Inter American Development Bank annual meeting here.

"Maybe the problems in the

world have something to do with the way we have set up the system" where there are global capital markets but no global currency, Hausmann said.

The IDB is to release a report here Sunday looking at Argentina's proposal to replace its currency with the dollar, and suggestions that such a system could be extended throughout Latin America.

University of California international business economics professor Sebastian Edwards said press reports suggesting the IDB report came out in favour of the idea, if true, "trivialises a very complex situation."

While Argentina's system of stabilising its currency through a currency board had worked, and dollarisation could seem an appropriate next step, this was far from being the case for other regional economies, Edwards said.

"I am convinced that while a currency board and maybe dollarisation is the right system for Argentina ... it is almost folly to think that Ecuador today could go in the same direction," Edwards said.

Mexican Finance Minister Jose Gurría told the seminar the "exchange rate is freely floating, and it has proved to be the appropriate system for Mexico," a senti-

ment echoed by Brazilian central bank chief Arminio Fraga.

"I am convinced that a floating exchange rate is appropriate for Brazil," he said.

There has been much debate in recent months on the best way to improve stability in the international foreign exchange system in the wake of the Asian and Brazilian crises, but little agreement on how to achieve it.

German Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine, who resigned last week, had proposed target zones to limit fluctuations between the dollar, the yen and the euro.

France and Japan did not go that far but are in favour of some effort to limit fluctuations, while the United States insists that freely floating exchange rates may not be perfect but are the best option available.

The IDB groups 46 countries, bringing together Latin American and Caribbean countries with major industrial nations.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) research director Michael Mussa told the seminar that despite recent events, he believed prospects for Latin America are now "significantly better" than they have been in the past 30-35 years.

This year "will not be a good year for Latin America"

but 2000 does offer the prospect of a return to stable growth, Mussa said.

Brazil, Latin America's largest economy, is likely to continue in recession through the first half of this year, with the IMF forecasting it to bottom out mid-year, be flat in the third quarter and show a return to growth in the fourth quarter.

"It remains to be seen if that is an accurate prognosis," Mussa said. "My opinion is that it could be another quarter before the upturn comes," he said, but he added that the turnaround would happen before the end of the year.

He said it was difficult to see how the real would move, "but there is no reason for the real to go to 2.50 or 3.00 against the dollar, providing monetary policy is sufficiently tight."

"Mexico looks to be actually in pretty good shape. So long as the U.S. economy continues to grow strongly, Mexico should continue to grow" and should achieve economic growth this year of 2-3 per cent "or perhaps slightly higher," Mussa said.

The near-term prospects for other countries in the region are "not nearly as bright," however, with Venezuela showing negative growth this year as a result of low oil prices, along with Colombia, while Chile is likely to register slight positive growth.

Kuwait to ask WTO to extend its 2000 grace period

KUWAIT (R) — Kuwait will ask the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to extend its grace period for compliance with its regulations by up to four years, a senior customs official was quoted as saying.

"It is known that Kuwait enjoys a grace period which ends in 2000 ... We will ask the international organisation to extend the grace period until 2003 or 2004," the head of Kuwait's customs directorate, Ibrahim Al Ghanim, told Al Anba daily.

"Its (WTO) strict conditions will cover all sectors ... but with respect to customs they will include: 'Achieving a unified custom tariffs with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries ... to stop the current practice of searching all imported containers ... implementing rules on origin of goods ... and copyright laws ... abolishing protectionist custom tariffs,'" Ghanim added.

Arab Gulf states have been seeking for years to form a common market and have sent a draft unified custom tariffs law to the WTO for review. The common market is a key demand by major trading blocs to forge free trade accords.

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

- Barbecue tool
- Persian ruler
- Piccadilly dilly
- Revere
- Slow flow
- Use a
- Whistle
- Candle
- Computer input
- Cassowary's kin
- Hunting animal
- Danger signal
- Crack shots
- Flue
- Enhanced versions
- Thurman of "Flop Fiction"
- Pierces with horns
- Football series of plays
- Innate
- "Star Wars" princess
- Shoelace tip
- List of charges
- Little devil
- 1993 Indy 500 winner
- Robert and Alan
- Large ball
- Appraise
- Discolored
- Perry's creator
- Dismissal notice
- Geometry pioneer
- "Bus Stop" dramatist
- Currier and Ives
- Valerie Harper sitcom
- Acute
- Coke or Pepsi
- Bedding down
- Jug handles
- Director
- Preminger
- Vocalize

DOWN

- Infield cover, briefly
- Aroma
- Alaska town
- Matter of doubt
- One of the Five Nations
- Grassy ground
- Flame
- 15th-century Central American
- Recruit personnel
- and Louise
- Females
- Acoustom
- Peevish
- Sportscaster
- Barber
- Goals
- Marsh plant
- Jamaican citrus fruit
- "Trees" or "Birches," e.g.
- Find the answer
- Bob's partner?
- Verdi opera
- Map of lots
- Otherwise
- Artist Fra
- Like safe
- Phoenix five
- Entices
- Equates
- Exist
- Jones or Lee
- Itchy skin
- problem
- Enrage
- Chirk of the fairway
- Bombard
- Beauvite
- bonanza
- Brainstorm
- Nighttime
- Paulo

Peanuts



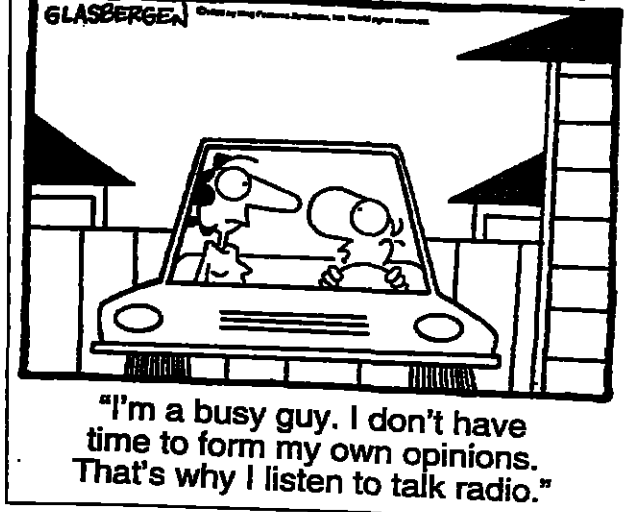
Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff



THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen



JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

TAVIL

TOXEL

NEMPAN

YALTIX

Ans: AN

WHAT THE TAX-MAN GAVE THE DOCTOR

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Yesterday's Jumbles: DOUSE EXCEL OUTING Mallow Answer: You might say the fashion model was this to his work — WELL SUITED

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Investments rise by 147 per cent

**** INVESTMENT SHOT** up by 147 per cent from the beginning of this year until March 10, 1999, the Investment Promotion Corporation announced in a press release. The corporation said a total of 41 projects with investments of around JD66.4 million benefited from the advantages and incentives associated with Investment Law number 16 issued in 1995. During the same period last year, only 28 projects with investments of JD26.9 million took the privileges mentioned above.

Sectorally, 35 projects were industrial and carrying a total investment of about JD58 million which is an amount representing 87 per cent of the overall investments. The industrial sector accounted for 55 per cent of the overall investments during the same period of 1998.

Hospitals and hotels ranked in second and third place as investments in them amounted to JD5 million and JD3.1 mil-

lion respectively. Only one hospital project accounted for seven per cent of the overall investments and three hotel projects accounted for five per cent of the total. During the same period last year the investments in hospitals and hotels were 33 per cent and seven per cent of the overall investments.

Two agricultural projects with a JD0.5 million investment were registered in 1999. Both accounted for one per cent of the overall amount compared to two per cent in 1998.

The corporation indicated that foreign investments in the projects reached JD22.2 million, 33 per cent of the overall investments compared to only three per cent during the same period of 1998. U.S. and Canadian investments ranked first with a JD9 million total followed by Arab investments that amounted to JD2.4 million. European investments totalled JD0.7 million.

Amman Bourse replaces AFM

**** WHEN THE** stock exchange opens today (Sunday), after the new arrangement of a two-day holiday on Friday and Saturday, it will no longer be referred to as the Amman Financial Market (AFM) because as of March 11, the name has been changed to the Amman Bourse. The change of name is in line with the 1997 Securities Law which also established two related entities: The Jordan Securities Commission and the Depository and Transfer Centre.

The Amman Bourse was placed in the hands of the private sector represented by seven members who include three representatives of the 27 licensed brokerage

firms, two from the commercial banks which established their own brokerage companies and two appointed by the Jordan Securities Commission (JSC).

Mohammed Bilbeisi, Dawood Qishtah and Walid Najjar were elected Thursday to represent the brokerage firms and Samir Jaradat and Hani Halawani were elected to represent the commercial banks. Abdul Rahman Touqan and Muflih Agel were appointed by the JSC. Meeting after the elections were completed, the members of the board elected Abdul Rahman Touqan to be chairman. Jalil Tarif who held the post of deputy general manager at the AFM was appointed executive director for the bourse.

U.S. firm pays \$650 million for Israeli software company

TEL AVIV (AFP) — BMC Software of Houston, Texas, has bought Israel's New Dimension Software for \$650 million in the biggest buyout ever of a local company, officials said Tuesday.

New Dimension, which is traded on the NASDAQ market in New York and had sales of \$93.6 million in 1998, signed a share purchase and tender agreement with BMC on Monday, said Dalia Prashker, one of New Dimension's three founders.

BMC, the world's 12th largest independent software vendor, paid cash for the

Israeli specialist in enterprise management software.

"This was a great deal," said Prashker, who founded New Dimension with two partners in 1983. The company came out four years later with a highly successful systems management programme for corporate users.

BMC's acquisition of New Dimension came ahead of the U.S. firm's planned merger on March 30 with Boole and Babbage, New Dimension's exclusive distributor in Europe.

Alcatel to cut 12,000 jobs over two years

PARIS (AFP) — Telecommunications group Alcatel plans to cut 12,000 jobs worldwide over the next two years to achieve cost savings of around 300 million euros (\$342 million).

Alcatel managing director Serge Tchuruk announced the job cuts along with the company's 1998 results, which showed net profit surging to 2.34 billion euros from 711 million euros in 1997. Many of the job losses will be in the United States where the group is to shut down its Alcatel Data Networks unit.

The company, which saw its share price plunge almost 40 per cent in a single day in September when Tchuruk warned the 1998 results would be worse than hitherto indicated, said that it expected

its telecom sales achieve double-digit growth this year.

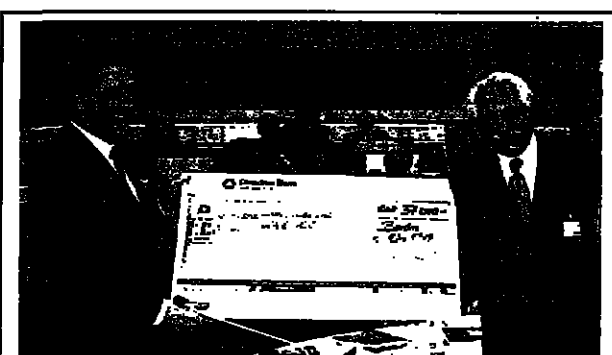
Operating profit would rise at the same level as in 1998, the company said. Operating profit rose 40 per cent last year, although analysts had hoped for a 60 per cent increase.

The share price has regained some 20 per cent of its value in recent weeks after Alcatel moved decisively to improve its position on the Internet market with the purchase of two U.S. specialists in the field, Xylan Corp and Assured Access Technologies.

The company said that "recently undertaken strategic operations will increase our profit capacity and significantly improve the telecoms margins" in 2000.

Villeroy & Boch tableware division celebrates its 250th anniversary with the fine art schools of Jordan

EXCEPTAL this legend, Villeroy & Boch has published an exceptional book relating and illustrating the art of Porcelain from the late baroque times to the present days. Two copies of this limited edition book was offered by the House of Villeroy & Boch to art schools in Amman to help the coming generations shape the future... artistically.



Kurt Ritter, president and chief executive officer Radisson SAS Hotels Worldwide handing over the cheque for \$40,000 (euro 37,000) to Federico Mayor, director general UNESCO during a press conference at the ITB in Berlin on March 6th 1999.

Women bankers say sexism widespread in London's financial centre

LONDON (R) — London's financial centre is a male-dominated preserve where men earn more, employers discriminate against women and have little sympathy for working mothers, according to a Reuters survey of women in banking.

Out of 50 women who took part in the survey — all of whom requested anonymity — 80 per cent said sexual discrimination persists in London's banks, although the biggest worry is how to combine careers with motherhood.

The survey of analysts, brokers, economists and fund managers, taken over the last four months, asked for women's views on working hours, promotion, and pay compared with men.

"In terms of pay, one is under the impression that men come out better," said a senior fund manager. "The glass ceiling for me has definitely been hit," she added.

Working mothers get little support. Twenty-six women said employers are unsympathetic to mothers who have full-time jobs in London's financial centre, The City.

"It would absolutely kill my career if I had children," said one economist. "Employers have to wake up to the fact that women want to combine jobs with families."

Women said that having children can ruin promotion prospects because working hours are too long and not flexible enough.

"Promotion prospects are far worse if a woman takes time off to have a child," said one analyst. "She'll blow her bonus for a year and will ruin her chances of career advancement."

As for sexual discrimination, 40 women said it exists in the city with 39 saying that it has an impact on women's careers. Women said men feel threat-

ened by ambitious women and others said men make sexist comments around the office. "You feel uncomfortable but you learn to survive," said one economist.

Others disagreed. "I don't think the discrimination women mean about exists," said an economist. "It can actually be a benefit to be a female if you can play it the right way."

The survey found that women in banking worked an average of 55 hours a week and 33 respondents said women worked the same hours as their male colleagues.

Promotion worse for women but women were divided on whether promotion prospects are on a par with men in similar jobs. While 19 said prospects are the same, 29 said prospects are "worse" or "far worse" for women.

"Getting started at the entry level is difficult," said one analyst. "Recognition in the first few years is key."

And as women move up the scale, promotion prospects can be bleak. "Opportunities can dry up when you reach a senior position," said one treasury manager. "Women often have to look outside their current employer if they want to move up."

Respondents also said women can be the first in line for job cuts. "Women are often at the top of the list when it comes to laying people off. They're fairly lowly in the scheme of things as they're not part of the old boy network," said one economist.

Women need aggressive attitude to get ahead. Women in the survey had strong views on how to get ahead in the city. An aggressive attitude and an ability to navigate internal politics are prerequisites for a city job, they said.

"Women have to be aggressive but not angry. You have to

do everything men do but give 10 per cent more," said an analyst.

One respondent said that a woman's looks can play a role in how they get on in banks. "You need to be pushy, ambitious, hard-working — and attractive," the analyst said.

But others said women need to perform better than male colleagues and find a male mentor to help them climb the corporate ladder.

"You have to be better than a man and work just as hard," said an economist. "Also at some point a man has to give you an opportunity and take a chance on you."

Many respondents spoke of the "old school boy's network" in The City, saying that men seem to get ahead because of male private school connections. "Cronyism is certainly a factor in The City," said a fund manager.

Other women suggested that male managers have to promote women actively into more senior positions. "Positive discrimination is needed as it is the only way to force men to work with women at a senior level," said one senior economist.

One U.S. broker said women bankers in London find it hard to build contacts with other women in their profession. But Sharon Davies, chairwoman of the 700-strong group women in banking and finance, said women are now seeing the benefits of "networking."

"More women are waking up to the fact that networking is helpful for progress in The City," said Davies.

But one strategist said if women take on a city job they have to realise the road to the top can be rocky. "It is very difficult to see what could be realistically changed," she said. "You take the job on and have to accept it for what it is."

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 14, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Your team could win the championship today, through sheer brilliance and good luck. Your own forward movement looks temporarily blocked, however. Keep your passions under control. Jealousy is one you definitely want to avoid. Jumping to conclusions could cause trouble, and the heart you break might be your own. Stay cool.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Why do things always seem to need fixing on Sunday, when you have to pay time and a half? It might be worth it, though, if your mate is the kind who has good intentions but no mechanical skill. You might even want to hide the broken item until tomorrow. You don't want short tempers to ruin an otherwise lovely day.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) There may be some work to be done, but you've got other things on your mind. Those chores can probably wait until tomorrow. Once you've made that decision, you might as well stop worrying about them. They're not going anywhere, but you might be, and probably should. Everybody will have a much better time with you at the party.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) If you get an early start on shopping, you'll have the rest of the day for love. If you get an early opportunity for love, however, the shopping may just have to wait. Although you love a bargain, you're certainly no fool when it comes to setting priorities. Today, just make sure the most important things gets done first.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) There's no point in arguing today with a person who knows it all. He or she might be right, and then where would you be? Instead of running the risk of losing, save your energy for a game you can win. Looks like there's one coming along soon.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Guard against the impulse to move quickly again. Study your every move, especially if you're not quite sure how to proceed. Even if you've done the job before, you still need to be careful. Besides, the more you study, the more likely a lucky break will be in your favour.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Someone you thought you knew well could surprise you today. Don't make any assumptions, just because things went a certain way once doesn't mean that's how they'll go again. It's always good to learn from the past, of course, but you don't want to be limited by it, especially not now. Cheerfully support a change for the better.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You're a pretty tough cookie, but today you could feel almost defeated. Almost, but not quite, and only for a second. Just keep that thought to yourself. You know how contagious despair can be, and you don't want a loved one to pick it up. And it won't turn out the way you fear. Something unexpected, and positive, will happen instead.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Money requires attention again today, but only temporarily. You need to figure how to buy something you need, which will help you learn how to accomplish your next project. Changes around the house look like they're about to be made. You've been putting up with something you didn't like long enough. Today, fix it.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) You could have a windfall today, as well as unexpected expenses. There are more than enough surprises, good and bad, to go around. You're going to have to keep track of what's going on if you want to end up with a profit. It'll be kind of like chasing a bouncing ball, but if anybody can do it, you can.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You might clash today with a person who tries to tell you what to do. You're pretty nice about this sort of thing, but today it could really rub you the wrong way. What's so silly is that the other person doesn't have a clue. You're the one who understands what's going on. Try to explain that as nicely as possible.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) If you're planning to travel today, take care. Better check your fluid levels — could get in your path. Looks like at least one obstacle there could be technical difficulties. It looks like they'll all be solved. But don't put off that oil change any longer.

Birthstone of March: Aquamarine — Jasper

Nestle's Perrier Vittel 1998 sales up 24 per cent

PARIS (AFP) — Nestle's mineral water unit Perrier Vittel had full-year sales of 23.8 billion francs (3.6 billion euros, \$4 billion) last year, up 24 per cent from a year earlier, Chairman Hans-Dieter Kalscheuer has said.

The figure includes sales from San Pellegrino, which Perrier Vittel acquired last year. Excluding San Pellegrino, full-year sales growth would have been nine per cent.

The U.S. and Canada contributed 31 per cent to the total, Germany 25 per cent, Italy 19 per cent, and France 17 per cent. The company said 92 per cent of its sales came from those regions, with Asia only accounting for one per cent of the total figure.

Perrier Vittel distributes mineral water under 65 brand names worldwide producing 11.5 billion litres (three billion gallons), and has a global market share of 15.8 per cent.

Water had become a strategic activity, one of the main growth areas for Nestle, Kalscheuer said.

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Serena Williams moves to final against Graf

INDIAN WELLS (AFP) — Serena Williams is ready to make the move from teen phenomenon to WTA Tour contender.

The 17-year-old American powered past France's Sandrine Testud 7-5, 6-0 Friday, avenging a third-round Australian Open defeat and reaching the final of the \$1.25 million Evert Cup.

"I definitely think I've matured a lot in the past six weeks," said Williams, who surrendered a third-set lead to Testud in Australia. "I've really realised it's not time to play around anymore."

"It's always someone's turn. Five years from now, there's going to be another player who's going to be just great. It's not going to be my turn. So now is the time."

Williams, 17, won her first WTA Tour title in Paris less than two weeks ago. Against Testud she stretched her current match winning streak to 10.

She won the last eight games of the match — breaking Testud in the 12th game to lift the opening set and losing just five points in the entire second set.

She said part of her new maturity was an ability to keep her concentration and finish off a match.

"If I'm ahead, unless the player comes up with some great winners, there's nothing you can do about that," she said. "If they don't do that, I just can't allow myself to lose those matches anymore. I have to grow up mentally."



Serena Williams of the U.S. returns a forehand against Sandrine Testud of France during their Evert Cup semifinal in Indian Wells, California. Williams won 7-5, 6-0 and will play Steffi Graf in the final (AFP photo)

Testud, ranked 14th in the world, said she noticed the difference in Williams' game since January.

"She was very consistent the whole match," Testud said. "It didn't happen that way in the past. She could play unbelievable shots, play great games for a few games, one set maybe. But she was never going to play her whole match like she did today."

Williams, whose triumph in Paris came on the same day that older sister Venus won in Oklahoma City, will meet fifth-seeded German Steffi Graf in the final.

Graf rolled through her first three games before struggling

for a three-set win over unseeded American Chanda Rubin.

Rubin had beaten World No.1 Martina Hingis in the quarter-finals, and she flat outplayed Graf in the first set of their match.

But Testud said Graf's victory showed that Williams would need more than confidence to beat the German veteran.

"It's going to be tough for Serena," she said. "She's going to have to be at least as good as she was today. In the match yesterday against Chanda, Steffi didn't play very well at the beginning. But she hung out there and

she fought back to win this match.

"Serena has to be aware of this."

While Williams seemed to have respect for Graf, who wasn't intimidated by the prospect of taking on the former world No. 1 and winner of 21 Grand Slam titles.

"I'm going to have to be very consistent because Graf, she's on her way back," Williams said. "She's playing great tennis right now. She's really focused."

"She's a good athlete. She's fast. I'm fast. I'm a great athlete. It's going to be exciting," Williams said.

Moya moves within 1 match of the summit

INDIAN WELLS, California (AFP) — French Open champion Carlos Moya moved within one match of claiming the World No. 1 ranking Friday with a straight-set win over Karol Kucera in the quarter-finals of the Champions Cup.

Moya became the only player to reach the semifinals without dropping a set with a 6-4, 6-4 victory. But he had to come back

was closer. Then after the first day I won and all the others lost, it came to my mind," Moya said.

The man blocking his path is Brazilian Gustavo Kuerten, the 1997 French Open champion who stopped Kafelnikov in the second round.

On Friday Kuerten took care of another seed, No. 8 Richard Krajicek of the Netherlands, 6-4, 6-4. Kuerten, now ranked 22nd



U.S. tennis player Chris Woodruff returns a backhand against Tim Henman of Great Britain at the Champions Cup quarterfinals in Indian Wells, California. Woodruff won 6-1, 1-6, 7-5 (AFP photo)

from 3-0 down in the second set to do it.

"I knew that Kucera is up and down," Moya said. "You think it's easy to beat him. I was four-love up. I thought I was playing against the 900th player in the world. Suddenly, he's No. 1."

"It's not easy to concentrate with such a player."

Moya has only to reach the final to become the 15th man to claim the World No. 1 spot since the computer rankings were instituted, and he would join former women's No. 1 Arantxa Sanchez Vicario as the only top-ranked players from Spain.

He said reaching No. 1 would eclipse his Roland Garros victory as his greatest tennis achievement.

"I thought winning a Grand Slam was the most important thing I could ever make," he said. "Now I think this is the most important, because there have been only 14 No. 1's in the whole history. Every year there are four winners of Grand Slams."

He was a little surprised to find himself so close. At the start of the week, he was one of four players, along with world No. 2 Yevgeny Kafelnikov, No. 3 Alex Corretja, and No. 5 Pat Rafter, with a chance of topping Pete Sampras.

"I wasn't playing that well, Kafelnikov was playing much better than me. He



Mark Philippoussis of Australia celebrates after defeating Todd Martin of the U.S. during quarterfinal action at the Champions Cup in Indian Wells, California. Philippoussis defeated Martin 3-6, 7-5, 6-1 to advance to the semifinals and play Chris Woodruff of the U.S. (AFP photo)

in the world, has won all four of his meetings with Moya. For him, Saturday's semifinal was a win-win situation.

"I'm going to be happy if I'm going to the final, or he's going to be No. 1," Kuerten said. "He's a great guy, my friend. I'm going to be happy for him."

Seventh-seeded Briton Tim Henman failed in his bid to reach his third semifinal of the year.

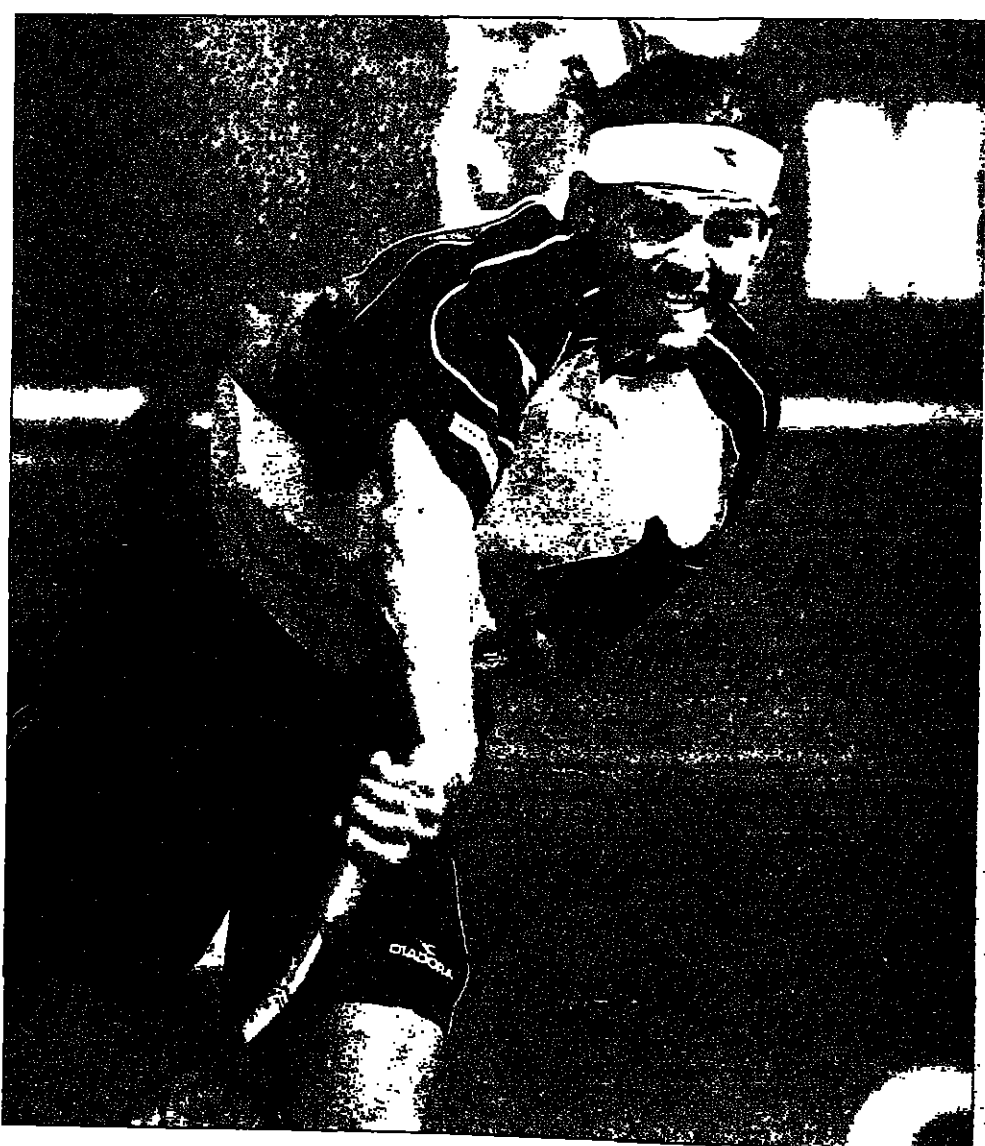
He was stunned by U.S. qualifier Chris Woodruff — ranked 550th in the world — 6-1, 1-6, 7-5.

Henman, who battled

back from 0-40 to win the last game against Greg Rusedski on Thursday, was unable to pull off a similar feat serving at 5-4 of the third against Woodruff.

Woodruff's lowly ranking is a bit deceptive for the 1997 Canadian Open champion. It dropped precipitously last year when he played just one match last year because of a left knee injury.

In the semifinals Woodruff will face Australian Mark Philippoussis, who rallied to beat American Todd Martin 3-6, 7-5, 6-1.



Brazilian tennis player Gustavo Kuerten serves against Richard Krajicek from the Netherlands at the Champions Cup play in Indian Wells, California. Kuerten won 6-4, 6-4 (AFP photo)



Picture dated November 1998 of Arsenal London's French forward Nicolas Anelka (up) challenged by Wimbledon's Chris Perry during their English Premiership clash at Wimbledon's Selhurst Park. Marseille are willing to pay \$16 million for Anelka to give added firepower to the attack, it was revealed Friday (AFP photo)

Samaranch will stay, insists Pound

PARIS (AFP) — International Olympic Committee (IOC) sleazebuster Dick Pound Friday insisted that the governing body's President Juan Antonio Samaranch must see out his term despite renewed newspaper speculation that he will retire from his post before his mandate expires in 2001.

Pound, one of the most powerful IOC members who earlier unveiled the findings of his latest probe into the corruption scandal that has rocked the Olympic movement, categorically denied that Spaniard Samaranch had hinted he might go early.

The Canadian said: "He (Samaranch) has never said to me he is thinking of stepping down. It is a private decision he would have to make."

"He is a very able politician. I don't think it would make sense for him to say, as he is sorting everything out, 'by the way I'm going to step down before the end of my term.'"

But Pound conceded when a line is eventually drawn over the sleaze scandal that the time might be right for Samaranch to go.

Pound said: "After that he may decide to go or he may stay for the rest of his term."

Leverkusen work hard for no reward

COLOGNE (AFP) — Bayer Leverkusen's 1-0 defeat at Borussia Dortmund Friday saw them fall off the pace in their chase to catch leaders Bayern Munich, opening the door for Dortmund to rise to fourth.

Heiko Herrlich, who has spent much of this season injured or on the bench, scored the only goal of the match in the 13th minute.

Leverkusen battled hard in a physical game but were not clinical enough up front.

In injury time they had two fine chances to equalise through Nico Kovac and Stefan Beinlich, but were

short of luck in a tense final phase.

"We dominated for long periods, pushing them onto the defensive, but what we missed out on was a goal," Leverkusen coach Christoph Daum said.

Goalscorer Herrlich finished the game on the bench after being shown his second yellow card for a clumsy tackle in the 87th minute and Dortmund trainer Michael Skibbe was left to wonder about his team's true potential.

"After our early goal we didn't settle down properly," Skibbe said. "I am happy with the way we

fought and defended our lead tooth and nail but we are still a long way off from being a really top team."

Bayern Munich, who travel to Hamburg Saturday, remain runaway leaders with 53 points over Leverkusen (41 points), Kaiserslautern (39) and Dortmund (38).

In Friday's second fixture Freiburg defeated Hansa Rostock 3-0.

Rostock, who are 17th and sacked coach Ewald Lienen last weekend, remain deep in relegation strife with little relief in sight.

Cinema Theatre Cinema Theatre Cinema Theatre Cinema Theatre						
CINEMA TEL:463-4144 PHILADELPHIA '1' Robert De Niro... in RONIN Shows: 12:30, 2:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	CINEMA TEL:463-4144 PHILADELPHIA '2' Tom Hanks & Sally Field... in FORREST GUMP Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, 9:00	CINEMA TEL:5699238 PLAZA Comedian Adel Imam... in AL ZA'EEM Shows: 12:15, 3:15, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	CINEMA TEL:5677420 CONCORDE Adel Imam & Wajdi Amer... in ALWAD MAHROUS BTA' AL WAZIR Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30 CONCORDE 2 FEAR	CINEMA TEL:5934793 GALLERIA 1 ABDOUN www.cns.com.jo/Galleria DANCE WITH ME Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:45	CINEMA TEL:5934793 GALLERIA 2 ABDOUN www.cns.com.jo/Galleria Michael Douglas... in A PERFECT MURDER Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:45	Hisham Yanes Theatre TEL: 4625155 CLOSED

Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.

LOCAL SPORTS SCENE



Orthodoxi prepares to host W. Asian basketball tourney

AMMAN — Amman Mayor Nidal Hadid is expected to head a meeting of the higher committee in charge of organising the West-Asian Basketball Championship to discuss preparations for the event and name sub-committees' officials. Al Orthodoxi Club will host the championship to be held April 12-17 with seven countries taking part. Lebanon, Iran, Yemen and Iraq have named their teams, while contacts are continuing with Palestine and Syria to name their teams.

Equestrian team to compete in Syria's Basel Championship

AMMAN — The national equestrian team will leave for Syria next week to take part in the four-day Al Basel International Championship. Names of the delegation will be submitted to HRH Princess Alia, as the Jordan Equestrian Federation is trying to secure funding for the participation which comes amid preparations for the 9th Pan-Arab Games — Al Hussein Tournament. The Jordanian team is headed by veteran Hani Bisharat and includes seniors Muna Sukhtian and Husam Bahou in addition to the best junior members of the national team.

Basketball federation's outdoor court to be covered

AMMAN — In its latest meeting, the 9th Pan-Arab Games' Executive Committee presented a memo to the Games Construction Committee to conduct maintenance works on a number of stadiums and sports facilities. The work includes Al Ahli Club indoor court; covering the Jordan Basketball Federation's stadium and maintain its floor; maintain and change the floor of Squash stadiums at Al Hassan International Squash Centre; in addition to changing the track at Al Hussein Youth City's stadium and maintain its tennis stadium.

Compiled by Ahmad Khatib

SCORECARD

German League

Borussia Dortmund	1	B. Leverkusen	0
Freiburg	3	Hansa Rostock	0

NBA

Indiana	109	Milwaukee	104
Philadelphia	100	New Jersey	93 (OT)
Charlotte	92	Washington	83
Detroit	93	Boston	83
Chicago	76	New York	63
San Antonio	99	Phoenix	97
Utah	91	Portland	77
LA Lakers	89	Golden State	78
Minnesota	101	Sacramento	95

European Basketball Championships Draw for 1999 tournament in France June 21 to July 3

Groupe A: Yugoslavia, France, Israel, Macedonia
Groupe B: Russia, Spain, Slovenia, Hungary
Groupe C: Italy, Turkey, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina
Groupe D: Greece, Lithuania, Germany, Czech Republic
The first three teams in each group will progress to the next round.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TANNAH HIRSCH
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ANSWERS TO WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ

- Q. 1 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
AJ 103 C974 QJ7 4A Q65
- The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1C 2C 3C 4C
What action do you take?
- A - There is only one way to show a good hand after your right-hand opponent has made a take-out double and that is to redouble. There is no reason why you should not take that action now. Depending on developments, your intent should be to raise hearts next.
- Q. 2 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:
AA6 7A84 10762 4J843
- The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1A 2A 3A 4A
What do you bid now?
- A - With such tenuous stoppers in the minors, in which partner is known to be short, you don't want to play in three no trump. If you knew partner had five hearts, you would cheerfully bid game in that suit. The way to find out is to take a false preference to three spades. That gives partner the chance to rebid a five-card heart suit.
- Q. 3 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:
AAK7 C7K4 103 4AK1074
- Your right-hand opponent opens the bidding with three diamonds. What action do you take?
- A - What an awkward hand. You have too much to have enough to reopen, not the desirable shape for a double and a suit too weak to introduce at the four-level. The least of evils is to double. At worst, partner will have to play the contract in a major on a Moynan 4-3 fit.
- Q. 4 - East-West vulnerable, as South you hold:
AJ984 7654 QAKJ8742 46
- Your right-hand opponent opens the bidding with one club. What do you bid now?
- A - If you are going to preempt, do so whole hog. With nine playing tricks (the fourth spade counts as one), to bid anything less than five diamonds at any vulnerability wins the Chicken-of-the-Year award.
- Q. 5 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
464 79862 QAS 4Q8643
- Partner opens the bidding with one no trump. What do you respond?
- A - It would be nice to check for a possible 4-4 heart fit with two clubs, but what if partner denies a major or bids spades? Now, you are trump by you would not only be institutional, but a gross overbid. Pass.
- Q. 6 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:
AK3 CAJ104 QAKQ3 4K62
- The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1A 2A 3A 4A
What do you bid now?
- A - You are certainly interested in slam, but cannot yet be sure of the right strain — clubs, no trump or even diamonds are possibilities. For the moment, bid two hearts. That does not promise a suit, but is 100 percent forcing. Partner's rebid will clarify the situation.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Kidnappers free Peruvian star

LIMA (AFP) — Kidnappers freed former Peruvian football star Roberto Martinez Friday, two days after he was abducted. Martinez, one of this South American nation's greatest football stars, said he was taken to Santa Maria beach — 40 kilometers (24 miles) south of Lima — in the early hours of Friday morning and left there. "I had to walk two and a half hours until I found a passenger bus that took me to the city," he said. Reports had said the kidnappers demanded a ransom of half a million dollars. But Martinez, one-time national team star, said no ransom was asked. "They made a mistake with me. I'm not a millionaire," he said.

Brazil pick six new caps

RIO DE JANEIRO (AFP) — Brazilian coach Wanderley Luxemburgo has called up six new faces Friday for two friendly matches in South Korea and Japan on May 28 and 31. Inter Milan's troubled striker Ronaldo was again omitted after a season that has been plagued by injury problems. Defenders Roque Junior (Palmeiras) and Scheidt (Gremio), midfielders Marcos Paulo et Juninho (the Vasco de Gama player not the Atletico Madrid star) and forwards Alessandro (Santos) and Roni (Fluminense) are the new names for the squad which is seen as a preparatory selection for the Copa America. Real Betis midfielder Denilson was another high-profile omission from the squad. Andre, Rogerio, Seni, Cafu, Felipe, Serginho, Odvan, Roque Junior, Cesar, Scheidt, Flavio Conceicao, Emerson et Ze Roberto, Alex, Marcos Paulo, Rivaldo, Rogerio, Juninho, Alessandro, Elber, Amoroso, Fabio Junior et Roni.

Wachter wins giant slalom

SIERRA NEVADA, Spain (AFP) — Austrian veteran Anita Wachter won the final World Cup women's Giant Slalom race of the season here on Saturday. Wachter, who scored the 18th World Cup win of her career, clocked 2min 08.81sec after being fastest over both legs. It was her fourth win of the season. Anna Ottosson of Sweden was second, fully 1.73sec in arrears, with Andrine Flemmen of Norway third, 1.78 off the pace. Alexandra Meissnitzer of Austria won the World Cup Giant Slalom title with her eighth-place finish, adding the Crystal Globe to the overall World Cup crown she had already secured. Wachter, 31, finished second behind Meissnitzer in the Giant Slalom standings.

International Handball Federation invalidates Jordan's complaint

Ruling is binding and we respect it — Hamdan

By a Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Jordan Handball Federation (JHF) President Sari Hamdan has stressed that the Kingdom will respect the International Handball Federation (IHF) ruling regarding Jordan's "unjust disqualification" from the World Championship qualifiers which took place in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, last November. The Arbitration Committee of the IHF upheld the decision of the Technical Committee of the West Asian qualifiers where hosts Saudi Arabia took first place, while Jordan came runner up and officially qualified. However, following Jordan's 32-19 win over Bahrain, the Technical Committee of the championship announced that Kuwait qualified as runner up instead of Jordan when Bahrain's results were cancelled due to technicality in their final match against Jordan. The Arbitration Committee scrapped Bahrain's results at the championship citing that Bahrain had handed Jordan the win by passive play in the second half. The Kingdom then announced that it would

freeze membership in the AHF if a fair ruling was not reached pointing out that the match referees did not advise that Bahrain had a technical error but it was rather the Technical Committee who took that decision single-handedly after the match.

Jordan appealed its case with the IHF after lodging a complaint with the Asian Handball Federation (AHF) during meetings of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) held on the sidelines of the Asian Games in Bangkok in December.

The Kingdom cited that the Technical Committee of any championship does not have the authority to take such decisions but should leave that to the Asian or international federations.

Similarly Asian or international regulations do not stipulate cancelling the entire results of a team but rather considering a withdrawing team as loser by a 10-0 score in a given match.

However, after the invalidation of the complaint Hamdan said: "The ruling of the IHF is binding and we respect it. It is the ruling of a neutral panel." He explained that the Arbitration

Committee noted that it was the authority of the championship's Technical Committee to scrap the results of any team.

Hamdan said Jordan would not be deterred by the decision but rather work to advance the game after finally being ranked third on the map of Asian Handball.

He said the JHF will now try to host the qualifiers for the 2000 championships and had already contacted the AHF in that regard.

Furthermore, the JHF president said the men's and women's teams were training hard for the upcoming Pan-Arab Games in Amman.

Jordan's women's team will soon host its Iraqi and Syrian counterparts. They will later join the men's team for a training camp in Egypt.

The men's team will also play in the Croatia Cup and host the Croats in Amman later on.

Playing in Croatia is considered an excellent training and assessment chance for the team before the Pan-Arab Games as the top Arab teams will be there like Egypt who will host the World Championships in June.

Jazz pound Blazers to claim best record

PORTLAND (R) — The Utah Jazz reclaimed their status as cream of the NBA crop in the post-Michael Jordan era with a 91-77 pounding of the Portland Trail Blazers on Friday.

Karl Malone, who led the Jazz to the NBA finals the past two seasons where they fell to Jordan's Chicago Bulls, scored 21 points to go along with nine rebounds and five assists for Utah.

Bryon Russell added 19 points as the Jazz snapped Portland's eight-game winning streak and handed the Blazers their first home loss of the season.

The victory moved the Jazz (16-4) a half game ahead of the Blazers (15-4) for the league's best record.

The last time these clubs met earlier this month, Portland pulled off a thrilling double overtime win. This time overtime was never in the cards as the Jazz used a 35-25 third quarter to open a 73-58 cushion and never looked back.

"I don't know if this was a statement game, but it was a big game for us," said Utah guard Howard Eisley. "We want to get home-court advantage (in the playoffs), so we approached this as a big game." Jeff Hornacek chipped in 12 points and the Jazz reserves outscored the Portland bench 25-12. Damon Stoudamire scored 20 points and Isaiah Rider added 18 for Portland.

At Los Angeles, two days after being traded to the Lakers Glen Rice played his first game of the season and scored 21 points to lead his new team to an 89-78 victory over the Golden State Warriors.

Rice, who had missed the

entire season with Charlotte prior to the trade as he recovered elbow surgery, showed some rust, hitting just 8-of-21 from the field.

"Everyone was asking me how my elbow was, and it felt fine."

But my legs felt like I was running through mud," noted Rice.

Shaquille O'Neal scored all of his 20 points in the first half and grabbed 17 rebounds, while Kobe Bryant chipped in 18 points as the Lakers rolled to their 10th straight win.

At Indiana, Reggie Miller led six players in double figures with 22 points as the Pacers snapped Milwaukee's six-game winning streak and remained atop the central division with a 109-104 victory over the Bucks.

Dale Davis scored 18 points and grabbed 11 rebounds and Antonio Davis added 15 for the Pacers.

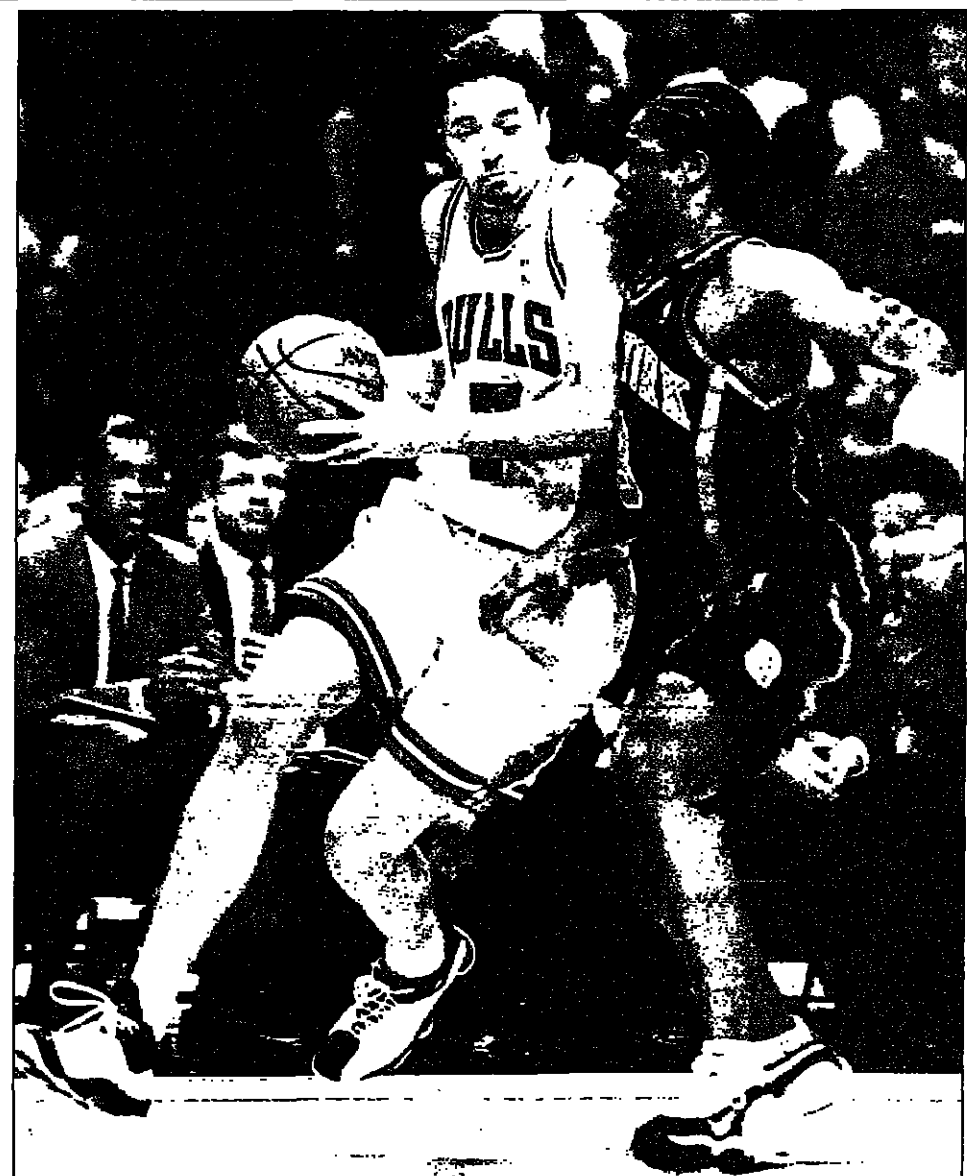
In Philadelphia, Allen Iverson hit two critical baskets early in overtime and finished with 28 points as the 76ers erased a 13-point fourth-quarter deficit to post a 100-93 victory over the struggling New Jersey Nets.

Keith Van Horn scored 25 points and grabbed 16 rebounds for New Jersey, which fell to 3-16, the worst record in the east.

In Detroit, Grant Hill scored 33 points on hot 11-of-14 shooting to lead the Pistons to a 93-83 win over the Boston Celtics.

Jerry Stackhouse added 18 points for the Pistons, who enjoyed a decisive advantage at the free throw line, connecting on 29-of-40 foul shots compared to just 7-of-16 for Boston.

Rice, who had missed the



Chicago Bulls' Toni Kukoc (L) heads for the basket past New York Knicks' Latrell Sprewell in the first half at the United Centre in Chicago, Illinois. The Bulls took an early 20-2 lead against the Knicks and held on to win 76-63. Kukoc scored four three-point baskets in the first quarter and 25 points in the game (AFP photo)

In Chicago, Toni Kukoc scored a game-high 25 points and the Bulls took advantage of the worst first half in New York Knicks history to post a 76-63 win.

Kukoc scored 11 of his points in a decisive 20-2 run and finished with 20 in the first half, when New York produced a franchise-low 23 points — a mere five in the second quarter.

In Phoenix, Tim Duncan

scored 26 points and Sean Elliott drained a leaning 18-footer at the buzzer to lift the San Antonio Spurs to a 99-97 win over the Suns for their sixth straight victory.

Tom Gugliotta scored 33 points and Cliff Robinson added 20 for the Suns, who erased a 17-point third-quarter deficit by outscoring the Spurs 31-17 in the final quarter.

In Washington, David Wesley scored 23 points and the Charlotte Hornets closed the game with a decisive 24-6 run to complete a 92-83 victory over the Wizards.

Calbert Cheaney had 22 points to pace the Wizards. In Sacramento, Kevin Garnett scored 26 points and grabbed 17 rebounds to lead the Minnesota Timberwolves to a 101-95 victory over the Kings.

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Palestinians praise new U.S. stance on settlements

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (R) — Palestinian officials on Saturday welcomed remarks by U.S. envoy Dennis Ross describing Jewish settlement activity as "very destructive to the pursuit of peace," but said more action against settlements was needed.

"Ross' statements on settlement activities were positive, but we would like to see U.S. action against settlements," said Ahmad Abdul Rahman, the Palestinian National Authority's cabinet secretary.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's communications chief, David Bar-Ilan, refused to comment on whether Ross' remarks marked a tougher U.S. policy on the settlement issue.

He said Israel would continue settlement expansion in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in order to "accommodate the natural needs and the natural growth" of Israelis living there.

"There should be no more objection to that than to the continued building in the villages and towns of the Arab population in the same areas," Bar-Ilan told Reuters.

In a telephone interview from Washington, Ross told Reuters on Friday: "We see settlement activity as very destructive to the pursuit of peace precisely because it predetermines and prejudices what ought to be negotiated."

"Therefore we don't see any issue of the permanent status being resolved either by unilateral declarations or by unilateral moves on the ground," he said.

U.S. officials have until now described Jewish settlements as an "obstacle to peace."

Palestinians say settlement activity is illegal and violates the 1993 Oslo accord that calls for both sides to refrain from undertaking unilateral acts which prejudice the outcome of permanent status talks.

They say they want the United States to suspend loan guarantees to Israel if it does not freeze construction of settlements on occupied lands in the West Bank and Gaza strip.

Ross said the U.S. would try to set a time limit on the conclusion of a final peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians after Israel's May 17 general election. Talks on a final peace have been dormant since Netanyahu took office in mid-1996.

Ross said a Palestinian declaration of statehood on May 4 would be a unilateral declaration, and that a Palestinian state should emerge from negotiations.

Nabil Amr, Palestinian minister of parliamentary affairs, welcomed Ross' remark that Washington would try to speed up final status negotiations, but called for the U.S. to recognise the Palestinian right to

Israeli peace activists help rebuild demolished houses

KAFR AL HARIIS (AFP) — Dozens of Israeli peace activists helped local Palestinians on Saturday to rebuild three houses in the West Bank that had been demolished by the Israeli army.

Some 50 activists, mainly from the Gush Shalom (Peace Bloc) group, worked on two Palestinian houses in the village of Kafr Al Haris in the north of the West Bank after the dwellings were torn down two months ago by Israeli military bulldozers, witnesses said.

The houses, sited near the Jewish settlement of Ariel, were destroyed because they had been built without licences, the army said at the time.

In February, the Israeli army used force to stop peace activists from rebuilding the two houses, firing tear gas to force the two owners and their families out.

In Hebron in the south of the West Bank more Israeli peace activists were working on Saturday to rebuild a third Palestinian house also destroyed because it was unlicensed, public radio reported.

Activists from the Peace Now group planted 300 olive trees outside the Palestinian village of Beit Dajan in the north of the West Bank to replace trees ripped up by the Israeli army to clear the way for a by-pass to serve nearby Jewish settlements, the witnesses said.

Israel routinely destroys Palestinian homes and property in areas occupied by the Jewish state in 1967 on the grounds the structures were built without proper authorisation.

statehood.

"We would like to see the Americans change their views on what they consider unilateral actions. Regarding declaration of Palestinian statehood, this is not a unilateral act, it's a Palestinian right," Amr told Reuters.

Arafat has said he reserves the right to declare an independent Palestinian state on May 4, the end of a five-year interim period laid down in the Oslo accords between Israel and the Palestine

Liberation Organisation.

He faces strong pressure from the United States, the European Union and some Arab countries to delay such a step, given the impact it could have on the outcome of Israel's election.

Ross made his remarks ahead of crucial talks in Washington set for March 23 between President Bill Clinton and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat on the issue of a Palestinian state.



FESTIVAL SCULPTURE: A worker puts the finishing touches Saturday on this year's tallest 'Falla,' called 'Na Jordana,' as part of preparations for the feast of Valencia's patron St. Joseph, to start March 19. The 'Fallas' are sculptures made of cardboard and wood that will be exhibited for a week before being set on fire, except for one of them which will be pardoned by a jury (AFP photo)

Thirteen die in fire bomb attack on Turkish store

ISTANBUL (R) — At least 13 people were killed and many more injured in a petrol bomb attack on a crowded Istanbul department store on Saturday, a fire service official said.

Fire tore quickly up through the five storey modern concrete and glass store in the Goztepe district on the Asian side of Turkey's biggest city. The building was gutted in the blaze.

Trees on the normally busy street were charred by the fire.

The Anatolia news agency quoted fire service radio traffic as saying firefighters had found 10 bodies in the attic and two others on the fifth floor of Mavi Carsi department store.

It was one of the worst such attacks in recent memory and took place at a time when the store would have been packed with shoppers.

As night fell, firefighters were still working on the roof of the store as smoke poured

from the ruins. Witnesses said three people threw petrol bombs into the building and fled the scene.

One person was killed and many injured in a series of previous attacks on business and shopping centres in Istanbul in the past week.

Responsibility for one of the attacks was claimed by a radical Maoist group, TIKKO, most active in the 1970s and more recently linked to the Kurdish separatist Kurdistan Labour Party (PKK) guerrilla group.

The blasts came amid a wave of violent protests sweeping Turkey since last month's capture of PKK rebel chief Abdullah Ocalan, who is being held on a high-security prison island.

Security services in Istanbul, Turkey's biggest city, have been on high alert since Ocalan, who led a 14-year-old armed guerrilla campaign for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey's southeast, was captured by Turkish special

forces in Kenya last month.

A senior PKK official said recently that any measure was justified in the fight against Turkish security forces.

Ocalan faces trial on treason charges and could receive the death sentence.

Though no one has been executed in Turkey since 1984, there could be strong public pressure for death sentence to be imposed on the 52-year-old Ocalan, dubbed by the Turkish press the "baby killer."

The Maoist group that claimed responsibility for an attack on a department store last week is believed to have reached an agreement last year to cooperate with the PKK in the Turkish countryside. But there had been no sign of cooperation in the major cities.

The PKK has little record of itself launching attacks in the major Turkish cities and has been active largely in mountainous rural areas of the largely-Kurdish southeast.

'Ocalan trial to reveal PKK's Europe backers'

ANKARA (AFP) — The upcoming trial of jailed Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan will disclose European countries which have provided his Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) with financial backing, the liberal Radikal newspaper reported Saturday.

"The PKK's financial relations will be revealed. Ocalan's trial also means the trial of countries that back the PKK in one way or another," senior Turkish diplomats headed by the Turkish foreign ministry's under-secretary Korkmaz Haktanir told the daily.

"Ocalan's testimony in court will upset a lot of countries," they added.

The alleged confessions of

Ocalan, who was captured and brought to Turkey last month, have already been published in Turkey's major newspapers, in which he is reported to have incriminated several countries including Italy, Greece, Germany, Romania and Serbia. Ankara has always argued that the PKK receives "aid from foreign countries" in its armed campaign since 1984 for Kurdish self-rule in Turkey's southeastern region, which has claimed almost 31,000 lives.

Turkey has especially warned its arch-rival Greece of "consequences" if it does not cease its support to the PKK after Greek officials admitted to sheltering Ocalan in the

Greek ambassador's residence in Kenya before his capture.

The diplomats also complained that European countries failed to take action against Europe-based media organisations which acted as the PKK's mouthpiece and organisations that transferred funds to the rebels.

"We have asked Europe to prevent these organisations from spreading the PKK's propaganda, but we have not yet seen a response," Haktanir said.

Turkey has for years been trying to stop the Belgium-based Kurdish television station, Med-TV, from broadcasting, arguing that it had direct links with the rebel group.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Bahrain to pursue pro-West policies

MANAMA (AP) — In his first address to the nation, Bahraini leader Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa on Saturday pledged to follow his late father's pro-Western policies. Sheikh Hamad took power earlier this month after the sudden death of his father, Sheikh Isa, who ruled Bahrain for 38 years. "With God's blessings, we shall pursue the approach established by the great, late leader" Sheikh Isa, Sheikh Hamad said in a televised address to the nation. Sheikh Hamad, who has led the military for the past three decades, said there will be no discrimination in Bahrain, regardless of a citizen's "origin and creed."

SLA member wounded in attack

MARIJAYOUN (AFP) — A member of Israel's proxy South Lebanon Army militia was wounded Saturday in a bomb attack by Hizbollah guerrillas in the Jewish state's south Lebanon "security zone." The SLA said. The militiaman was injured when a bomb blew up on a road in Sojod in the central sector of the Israeli-occupied zone, the SLA said. Hizbollah also carried out six other attacks against SLA and Israeli positions around the zone, without causing any casualties, the Israeli-called militia said. A Hizbollah statement confirmed that it attacked an SLA patrol on the Sojod road "and wounded several of its men." It also said it had carried out a series of machinegun and artillery attacks on "the occupation army and its agents," and claimed that it had "definitely" inflicted damage.

Six killed in Algeria's west

ALGIERS (AFP) — Six people, including three children, were slain overnight by an armed Islamic group in Algeria, the security services said Saturday. The killings took place at Douar Meias, in Hatatba commune, in the Tipaza region 70 kilometres west of the capital Algiers. The security services did not disclose the exact circumstances of the attack, or who the victims were. Four people were killed in the same region Wednesday at a roadblock set up by an armed group near Bouharoun, newspapers reported Saturday.

Iran approves ancient fire festival

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran has officially approved an ancient pagan year celebration, the Zoroastrian "Festival of Fire," for the first time since the 1979 Islamic revolution, newspapers reported Saturday. The more than 2,000-year-old festival, held the final Tuesday before the Iranian new year on March 21, has been given the green light by the interior ministry, which urged participants to be "careful." During the ancient rite people eat dried fruits and jump over fires to drive away evil spirits and cleanse their souls ahead of the new year. Thousands of police and firemen will be mobilised for the celebrations nationwide on Tuesday.

Israeli police investigate bribe attempts

TEL AVIV (R) — Israeli police said Saturday they were investigating attempts by foreign criminals to bribe politicians contesting the coming elections. "We know that large amounts of money are being injected into Israel in order to acquire [political] influence," Commander Yossi Sedbon, the head of the police investigation unit, told Israel radio. A police unit dealing with international crime was investigating the transfer to Israel of criminally acquired funds in order to buy political favours, he said. He said it was not clear whether the police could obtain enough evidence to charge suspects.

'Six Sudanese soldiers killed'

CAIRO (AFP) — Six Sudanese government soldiers were killed and 17 wounded when rebel forces launched a counter-attack, the rebels said in a statement received here Saturday. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) of southern and northern rebels struck Thursday at government troops who had launched an attack the night before in the Abu Gaddaf region of the Blue Nile state, the NDA said. The fighting lasted 24 hours and allowed the NDA to repel the government attack and "force the enemy to flee" after having killed six soldiers and wounded 17 others.

Iran government honours secular intellectuals, writers

TEHRAN (R) — Iran's Islamic government has honoured prominent writers in a public ceremony that marks a political about-face from two decades of official hostility toward the country's secular intellectuals.

Reformist newspapers on Saturday featured front-page coverage of Atoollah Mohajerani, the liberal minister of culture and Islamic guidance, handing out prizes for literary achievements since the 1979 revolution to secularists who not long ago were vilified, harassed and even murdered.

The recognition follows last year's string of "mystery murders" of at least four writers and nationalist politicians, later blamed on rogue elements in the security services. Among those honoured at Thursday's ceremony was novelist Mahmoud Dolatabadi, long relegated to the sidelines of official Iranian culture as a pro-Western stooge.

"This marks a turning point because they are now paying attention to people who have not been listened to for the past 20 years," writer Houshang Golshiri told Reuters. "All we have seen in the past 20 years are curses."

The Zan daily, close to moderate President Mohammad Khatami, hailed the event with a banner headline: "A new era in Iranian literature begins with reconciliation between writers and the government."

The culture minister, himself a target of conservative critics of Khatami's political and cultural reforms, said writers had to feel secure in order to realise their creative talents.

"Our effort is to allow writers in this country to be able to work in a quiet atmosphere and to be creative," state-owned Iran daily quoted Mohajerani as saying.

"But it is natural that we live in a system that has characteristics well-known to our writers," he said in an oblique suggestion that restrictions on intellectual life were unlikely to vanish altogether anytime soon.

The ceremony appeared to mark the public reversal of two decades of official persecution of cultural figures seen as less than supportive to Iran's Islamic system, backed up a recent decision to allow the resurrection of the pre-revolutionary writers association.

It was in that spirit, said Dolatabadi, that he and his fellow writers accepted their prizes. "I feel a sense of responsibility toward this trend toward freedom, individual and social rights and negation of violence," the author, who was not present at the ceremony, said in a message. "I accept the prize and I thank you."

Dolatabadi offered his prize to the families of Mohammad Mokhtari and Mohammad Pouyandeh, two of the victims of the mystery murders that shocked the nation and eventually brought down the conservative-backed minister of intelligence.

Mohajerani said the new atmosphere surrounding the arts would promote better work by Iranian artists.

The rehabilitation of the writers' association has drawn fire from conservative elements. A commentary in the hardline daily Kayhan said Mohajerani's ministry was irresponsible in allowing the group to be reconstituted.

"With the help and support of the culture ministry, the writers association has once again surfaced. Among its members are a bunch of people linked to the former regime and to anti-revolutionary currents. These are people who have no ties to the masses," the newspaper said.

Egypt asks U.S. to stop bombing campaign against Iraq

CAIRO (AFP) — Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has asked the United States to stop its relentless bombing raids against Iraq's air defences, Foreign Minister Amr Musa said here Saturday. "We cannot accept these almost daily raids against Iraq, nor the U.N. Security Council's inaction on this issue," Musa told journalists after meeting Arab

League Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid.

"The Security Council must move and study this issue, because maintaining this situation is dangerous," he added.

Musa said Mubarak outlined the Egyptian stand when he met with U.S. Secretary of Defence William Cohen in Cairo on Thursday. "Such is Mubarak's

position and our position is clear: We believe they are unjustified actions which achieve nothing and must not continue."

Musa stressed the need for Baghdad to cooperate with the U.N. Special Commission charged with overseeing the dismantling of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

The foreign minister said the raids which "Iraq is submitted to in the north and south undermine the country's sovereignty and security."

The latest raids carried out by U.S. and British warplanes on Friday targeted civilian and military installations in northern Iraq, but caused no casualties, an Iraqi military spokesman said.

Woman hit twice by same car in 24 hours

REYKJAVIK (R) — An Icelandic woman was hit twice by the same car within 24 hours, Iceland Review said. The woman, with an unblemished driving record of 20 years, was driving in Akureyri in northern Iceland Saturday when a car came out of a parking lot and smashed into her vehicle. After renting a car, the woman was hit the next day by the same car as she drove through a green light at an intersection. The offending driver said his vision had been impaired by low sunlight.

New Zealanders prefer sailing to sex

WELLINGTON (R) — New Zealanders prefer sleeping, eating and sailing to sex, a private research company said. UMR Insight asked 400 people their idea of a perfect way to spend an evening and sex came in 12th. Only one in 40 picked making love, long behind going out for dinner (29.5 per cent), a live show or concert (12.5 per cent), gambling (9.8 per cent) or getting a good night's sleep (9.3 per cent). Watching a movie, going out dancing, to a bar or even kayaking and sailing beat sex as the ultimate in entertainment, according to the poll.

City's budget error blamed on too much beer

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Among the \$41 million of miscalculations in the Salt Lake organising committee's budget, one stands out: Too much beer. The committee's new president, Mitt Romney, said Thursday that the 2002 Winter Games are expected to cost \$81 million more than when the budget was written last fall, and half of the amount is due to wrong assumptions. Those bad assumptions mostly had to do with federal funding, Romney said, but staffers say some of the mistakes came in calculations for beer, gravel and building supplies. When they reviewed the budget at Romney's behest this winter, staffers decided that sponsor Anheuser-Busch was donating more beer than could be consumed during the games.

House built in less than four hours

WELLINGTON (AP) — A team of about 100 builders and painters erected a house in New Zealand in less than four hours, organisers said Saturday. The house went from an empty site to a livable home, with lights on and carpets laid, in three hours, 44 minutes and 59 seconds, said Ian Cooper, a spokesman for Laserbilt, the project's chief sponsor.

Virtual 'gang' ends up in real trouble

FAYETTEVILLE (AP) — Law officers in this southern U.S. state have accused a group of teenagers of recruiting gang members based on a web site created by the group. Fayette county sheriff's deputies obtained warrants to arrest five teenagers on charges of violating the Georgia street gang and terrorism act. A 17-year-old, who was not identified, was arrested Thursday, and his father said he found the whole ordeal hard to comprehend. "One of our buddies last year jokingly created a web page and put five people's names on it," he said. "It's just five kids who live in the neighbourhood." If convicted of encouraging others to join the "Rollin' 5 Crackaz," the teenagers could be sentenced to 10 years in prison. Sheriff's Maj. Bruce Jordan said the web site, which gives the boys' full names along with "street" names such as Baby Z and Killa Turk, is a recruiting tool — even though it does not solicit members for a gang in this southern Atlanta suburb.

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